THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON

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THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON

BY

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THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN EAMES ENCOUNTERS TWO ADVENTURES, AND DISPLAYS GREAT COURAGE IN BOTH.

LILY thought that her lover's letter was all that it should be. She was not quite aware what might be the course of post between Courcy and Allington, and had not, therefore, felt very grievously disappointed when the letter did not come on the very first day. She had, however, in the course of the morning, walked down to the post-office, in order that she might be sure that it was not remaining there.

"Why, miss, they be all delivered; you know that," said Mrs. Crump, the post-mistress.

"But one might be left behind, I thought."

"John Postman went up to the house this very day with a newspaper for your mamma. I can't make letters for people if folks don't write them."

"But they are left behind sometimes, Mrs. Crump. He would n't come up with one letter if he 'd got nothing else for anybody in the street."

"Indeed but he would, then. I would n't let him leave a letter here nohow, nor yet a paper. It 's no good your coming down here for letters, Miss Lily. If he don't write to you, I can't make him do it." And so poor Lily went home discomfited.

But the letter came on the next morning, and all was right. According to her judgment it lacked nothing, either in fulness or in affection. When he told her how he had planned his early departure in order that he might avoid the pain of parting with her on the last moment, she smiled and pressed the paper, and rejoiced inwardly that she had got the better of him as to that manœuvre. And then she kissed the words which told her that he had been glad to have her with him at the last moment. When he declared that he had been happier at Allington than he was at Courcy, she believed him thoroughly, and rejoiced that it should be so. And when he accused himself of being worldly, she excused him, persuading herself that he was nearly perfect in this respect as in others. Of course a man living in London, and having to earn his bread out in the world, must be more worldly than a country girl; but the fact of his being able to love such a girl, to choose such a one for his wife,—was not that alone sufficient proof that the world had not enslaved him? "My heart is on the Allington lawns," he said; and then, as she read the words, she kissed the paper again.

In her eyes, and to her ears, and to her heart, the letter was a beautiful letter. I believe there is no bliss greater than that which a thorough love-letter gives to a girl who knows that in receiving it she commits no fault,—who can open it before her father and mother

with nothing more than the slight blush which the consciousness of her position gives her. And of all love-letters the first must be the sweetest! What a value there is in every word! How each expression is scanned and turned to the best account! With what importance are all those little phrases invested, which too soon become mere phrases, used as a matter of course. Crosbie had finished his letter by bidding God bless her; "and you too," said Lily, pressing the letter to her bosom.

"Does he say anything particular?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"Yes, mamma; it 's all very particular."

"But there 's nothing for the public ear."

"He sends his love to you and Bell."

"We are very much obliged to him."

"So you ought to be. And he says that he went to church going through Barchester, and that the clergyman was the grandfather of that Lady Dumbello. When he got to Courcy Castle Lady Dumbello was there."

"What a singular coincidence!" said Mrs. Dale.

"I won't tell you a word more about his letter," said Lily. So she folded it up, and put it in her pocket. But as soon as she found herself alone in her own room, she had it out again, and read it over some half-a-dozen times.

That was the occupation of her morning;—that, and the manufacture of some very intricate piece of work which was intended for the adornment of Mr. Crosbie's person. Her hands, however, were very full of work;—or, rather, she intended that they should be full. She would take with her to her new home, when she

was married, all manner of household gear, the produce of her own industry and economy. She had declared that she wanted to do something for her future husband, and she would begin that something at once. And in this matter she did not belie her promises to herself, or allow her good intentions to evaporate unaccomplished. She soon surrounded herself with harder tasks than those embroidered slippers with which she indulged herself immediately after his departure. And Mrs. Dale and Bell,—though in their gentle way they laughed at her,—nevertheless they worked with her, sitting sternly to their long tasks, in order that Crosbie's house might not be empty, when their darling should go to take her place there as his wife.

But it was absolutely necessary that the letter should be answered. It would in her eyes have been a great sin to have let that day's post go without carrying a letter from her to Courcy Castle,—a sin of which she felt no temptation to be guilty. It was an exquisite pleasure to her to seat herself at her little table with her neat desk and small appurtenances for epistle-craft, and to feel that she had a letter to write in which she had truly much to say. Hitherto her correspondence had been uninteresting and almost weak in its nature. From her mother and sister she had hardly yet been parted; and though she had other friends, she had seldom found herself with very much to tell them by post. What could she communicate to Mary Eames at Guestwick, which should be in itself exciting as she wrote it? When she wrote to John Eames, and told "Dear John" that mamma hoped to have the pleasure of seeing him to tea at such an hour, the work of writing was of little moment to her, though the note when

written became one of the choicest treasures of him to whom it was addressed.

But now the matter was very different. When she saw the words "Dearest Adolphus" on the paper before her, she was startled with their significance. "And four months ago I had never heard of him," she said to herself, almost with awe. And now he was more to her, and nearer to her, than even was her sister or her mother! She recollected how she had laughed at him behind his back, and called him a swell on the first day of his coming to the Small House, and how, also, she had striven, in her innocent way, to look her best when called upon to go out and walk with the stranger from London. He was no longer a stranger now, but her own dearest friend.

She had put down her pen that she might think of all this—by no means for the first time—and then resumed it with a sudden start as though fearing that the postman might be in the village before her letter was finished. "Dearest Adolphus, I need not tell you how delighted I was when your letter was brought to me this morning." But I will not repeat the whole of her letter here. She had no incident to relate, none even so interesting as that of Mr. Crosbie's encounter with Mr. Harding at Barchester. She had met no Lady Dumbello, and had no counterpart to Lady Alexandrina, of whom, as a friend, she could say a word in praise. John Eames's name she did not mention, knowing that John Eames was not a favourite with Mr. Crosbie; nor had she anything to say of John Eames that had not been already said. He had, indeed, promised to come over to Allington; but this visit had not been made when Lily wrote her first letter to Cros-

bie. It was a sweet, good, honest love-letter, full of assurances of unalterable affection and unlimited confidence, indulging in a little quiet fun as to the grandees of Courcy Castle, and ending with a promise that she would be happy and contented if she might receive his letters constantly, and live with the hope of seeing him at Christmas.

"I am in time, Mrs. Crump, am I not?" she said, as she walked into the post-office.

"Of course you be,—for the next half-hour. T' postman—he bain't stirred from t' ale'us yet. Just put it into t' box, wull ye?"

"But you won't leave it there?"

"Leave it there! Did you ever hear the like of that? If you 're afeared to put it in, you can take it away; that 's all about it, Miss Lily." And then Mrs. Crump turned away to her avocations at the washing-tub. Mrs. Crump had a bad temper, but perhaps she had some excuse. A separate call was made upon her time with reference to almost every letter brought to her office, and for all this, as she often told her friends in profound disgust, she received as salary no more than "tuppence farden a day. It don't find me in shoe-leather; no more it don't." As Mrs. Crump was never seen out of her own house, unless it was in church once a month, this latter assertion about her shoe-leather could hardly have been true.

Lily had received another letter, and had answered it before Eames made his promised visit to Allington. He, as will be remembered, had also had a correspondence. He had answered Miss Roper's letter, and had since that been living in fear of two things; in a lesser fear of some terrible rejoinder from Amelia, and

in a greater fear of a more terrible visit from his lady-love. Were she to swoop down in very truth upon his Guestwick home, and declare herself to his mother and sister as his affianced bride, what mode of escape would then be left for him? But this she had not yet done, nor had she even answered his cruel missive.

"What an ass I am to be afraid of her!" he said to himself as he walked along under the elms of Guestwick Manor, which overspread the road to Allington. When he first went over to Allington after his return home, he had mounted himself on horseback, and had gone forth brilliant with spurs, and trusting somewhat to the glories of his dress and gloves. But he had then known nothing of Lily's engagement. Now he was contented to walk; and as he had taken up his slouched hat and stick in the passage of his mother's house, he had been very indifferent as to his appearance. He walked quickly along the road, taking for the first three miles the shade of the Guestwick elms, and keeping his feet on the broad greensward which skirts the outside of the earl's palings. "What an ass I am to be afraid of her?" And as he swung his big stick in his hand, striking a tree here and there, and knocking the stones from his path, he began to question himself in earnest, and to be ashamed of his position in the world. "Nothing on earth shall make me marry her," he said; "not if they bring a dozen actions against me. She knows as well as I do, that I have never intended to marry her. It 's a cheat from beginning to end. If she comes down here, I 'll tell her so before my mother." But as the vision of her sudden arrival came before his eyes, he acknowledged to himself that he still held her in great fear. He had told her that he

loved her. He had written as much as that. If taxed with so much he must confess his sin.

Then, by degrees, his mind turned away from Amelia Roper to Lily Dale, not giving him a prospect much more replete with enjoyment than that other one. He had said that he would call at Allington before he returned to town, and he was now redeeming his promise. But he did not know why he should go there. He felt that he should sit silent and abashed in Mrs. Dale's drawing-room, confessing by his demeanour that secret which it behoved him now to hide from every one. He could not talk easily before Lily, nor could he speak to her of the only subject which would occupy his thoughts when in her presence. If indeed, he might find her alone—— But, perhaps that might be worse for him than any other condition.

When he was shown into the drawing-room there was nobody there. "They were here a minute ago, all three," said the servant-girl. "If you 'll walk down the garden, Mr. John, you 'll be sure to find some of 'em." So John Eames, with a little hesitation, walked down the garden.

First of all he went the whole way round the walks, meeting nobody. Then he crossed the lawn, returning again to the farther end; and there, emerging from the little path which led from the Great House, he encountered Lily alone. "Oh, John!" she said, "how d'ye do? I 'm afraid you did not find anybody in the house. Mamma and Bell are with Hopkins, away in the large kitchen-garden."

"I 've just come over," said Eames, "because I promised. I said I 'd come before I went back to London."

"And they 'll be very glad to see you, and so am I. Shall we go after them into the other grounds? But perhaps you walked over and are tired."

"I did walk," said Eames; "not that I am very tired." But in truth he did not wish to go after Mrs. Dale, though he was altogether at a loss as to what he would say to Lily while remaining with her. He had fancied that he would like to have some opportunity of speaking to her alone before he went away;—of making some special use of the last interview which he should have with her before she became a married woman. But now the opportunity was there, and he hardly dared to avail himself of it.

"You 'll stay and dine with us," said Lily.

"No, I 'll not do that, for I especially told my mother that I would be back."

"I 'm sure it was very good of you to walk so far to see us. If you really are not tired, I think we will go to mamma, as she would be very sorry to miss you."

This she said, remembering at the moment what had been Crosbie's injunctions to her about John Eames. But John had resolved that he would say those words which he had come to speak, and that, as Lily was there with him, he would avail himself of the chance which fortune had given him.

"I don't think I 'll go into the squire's garden," he said.

"Uncle Christopher is not there. He is about the farm somewhere."

"If you don't mind, Lily, I think I 'll stay here. I suppose they 'll be back soon. Of course I should like to see them before I go away to London. But,

Lily, I came over now chiefly to see you. It was you who asked me to promise."

Had Crosbie been right in those remarks of his? Had she been imprudent in her little endeavour to be cordially kind to her old friend? "Shall we go into the drawing-room?" she said, feeling that she would be in some degree safer there than out among the shrubs and paths of the garden. And I think she was right in this. A man will talk of love out among the lilacs and roses, who would be stricken dumb by the demure propriety of the four walls of a drawing-room. John Eames also had some feeling of this kind, for he determined to remain out in the garden, if he could so manage it.

"I don't want to go in unless you wish it," he said. "Indeed, I 'd rather stay here. So, Lily, you 're going to be married?" And thus he rushed at once into the middle of his discourse.

"Yes," said she, "I believe I am."

"I have not told you yet that I congratulated you."

"I have known very well that you did so in your heart. I have always been sure that you wished me well."

"Indeed I have. And if congratulating a person is hoping that she may always be happy, I do congratulate you. But, Lily——" And then he paused, abashed by the beauty, purity, and woman's grace which had forced him to love her.

"I think I understand all that you would say. I do not want ordinary words to tell me that I am to count you among my best friends."

"No, Lily; you don't understand all that I would say. You have never known how often and how

much I have thought of you; how dearly I have loved you."

"John, you must not talk of that now."

"I cannot go without telling you. When I came over here, and Mrs. Dale told me that you were to be married to that man——"

"You must not speak of Mr. Crosbie in that way," she said, turning upon him almost fiercely.

"I did not mean to say anything disrespectful of him to you. I should hate myself if I were to do so. Of course you like him better than anybody else?"

"I love him better than all the world besides."

"And so do I love you better than all the world besides." And as he spoke he got up from his seat and stood before her. "I know how poor I am, and unworthy of you; and only that you are engaged to him, I don't suppose that I should now tell you. Of course you could n't accept such a one as me. But I have loved you ever since you remember; and now that you are going to be his wife, I cannot but tell you that it is so. You will go and live in London, but as to my seeing you there it will be impossible. I could not go into that man's house."

"Oh, John!"

"No, never; not if you became his wife. I have loved you as well as he does. When Mrs. Dale told me of it, I thought I should have fallen. I went away without seeing you because I was unable to speak to you. I made a fool of myself, and have been a fool all along. I am foolish now to tell you this, but I cannot help it."

"You will forget it all when you see some girl that you can really love."

"And have I not really loved you? Well, never mind. I have said what I came to say, and I will now go. If it ever happens that we are down in the country together, perhaps I may see you again; but never in London. Good-bye, Lily." And he put out his hand to her.

"And won't you stay for mamma?" she said.

"No. Give her my love, and to Bell. They understand all about it. They will know why I have gone. If ever you should want anybody to do anything for you, remember that I will do it, whatever it is." And as he paced away from her across the lawn, the special deed in her favour to which his mind was turned,—that one thing which he most longed to do on her behalf,—was an act of corporal chastisement upon Crosbie. If Crosbie would but ill-treat her,—ill-treat her with some antenuptial barbarity,—and if only he could be called in to avenge her wrongs! And as he made his way back along the road towards Guestwick, he built up within his own bosom a castle in the air, for her part in which Lily Dale would by no means have thanked him.

Lily when she was left alone burst into tears. She had certainly said very little to encourage her forlorn suitor, and had so borne herself during the interview that even Crosbie could hardly have been dissatisfied; but now that Eames was gone, her heart became very tender towards him. She felt that she did love him also;—not at all as she loved Crosbie, but still with a love that was tender, soft, and true. If Crosbie could have known all her thoughts at that moment, I doubt whether he would have liked them. She burst into tears, and then hurried away into some nook where

she could not be seen by her mother and Bell on their return.

Eames went on his way, walking very quickly, swinging his stick and kicking through the dust, with his heart full of the scene which had just passed. He was angry with himself, thinking that he had played his part badly, accusing himself in that he had been rough to her, and selfish in the expression of his love; and he was angry with her because she had declared to him that she loved Crosbie better than all the world besides. He knew that of course she must do so;—that at any rate it was to be expected that such was the case. Yet, he thought, she might have refrained from saying so to him. "She chooses to scorn me now," he said to himself; "but the time may come when she will wish that she had scorned him." That Crosbie was wicked, bad, and selfish, he believed most fully. He felt sure that the man would ill-use her and make her wretched. He had some slight doubt whether he would marry her, and from this doubt he endeavoured to draw a scrap of comfort. If Crosbie would desert her, and if to him might be accorded the privilege of beating the man to death with his fists because of this desertion, then the world would not be quite blank for him. In all this he was no doubt very cruel to Lily;—but then had not Lily been very cruel to him?

He was still thinking of these things when he came to the first of the Guestwick pastures. The boundary of the earl's property was very plainly marked, for with it commenced also the shady elms along the roadside, and the broad green margin of turf, grateful equally to those who walked and to those who rode. Eames

had got himself on to the grass, but, in the fulness of his thoughts, was unconscious of the change in his path, when he was startled by a voice in the next field and the loud bellowing of a bull. Lord De Guest's choice cattle he knew were there, and there was one special bull which was esteemed by his lordship as of great value, and regarded as a high favourite. The people about the place declared that the beast was vicious, but Lord De Guest had often been heard to boast that it was never vicious with him. "The boys tease him, and the men are almost worse than the boys," said the earl; "but he 'll never hurt any one that has not hurt him." Guided by faith in his own teaching the earl had taught himself to look upon his bull as a large, horned, innocent lamb of the flock.

As Eames paused on the road, he fancied that he recognised the earl's voice, and it was the voice of one in distress. Then the bull's roar sounded very plain in his ear, and almost close; upon hearing which he rushed on to the gate, and, without much thinking what he was doing, vaulted over it, and advanced a few steps into the field.

"Hallo!" shouted the earl. "There 's a man. Come on." And then his continued shoutings hardly formed themselves into intelligible words; but Eames plainly understood that he was invoking assistance under great pressure and stress of circumstances. The bull was making short runs at his owner, as though determined in each run to have a toss at his lordship; and at each run the earl would retreat quickly for a few paces, but he retreated always facing his enemy, and as the animal got near to him, would make digs at his face with the long spud which he carried in his hand. But in

thus making good his retreat he had been unable to keep in a direct line to the gate, and there seemed to be great danger lest the bull should succeed in pressing him up against the hedge. "Come on!" shouted the earl, who was fighting his battle manfully, but was by no means anxious to carry off all the laurels of the victory himself. "Come on, I say!" Then he stopped in his path, shouted into the bull's face, brandished his spud, and threw about his arms, thinking that he might best dismay the beast by the display of these warlike gestures.

Johnny Eames ran on gallantly to the peer's assistance, as he would have run to that of any peasant in the land. He was one to whom I should be perhaps wrong to attribute at this period of his life the gift of very high courage. He feared many things which no man should fear; but he did not fear personal mishap or injury to his own skin and bones. When Cradell escaped out of the house in Burton Crescent, making his way through the passage into the outer air, he did so because he feared that Lupex would beat him or kick him, or otherwise ill-use him. John Eames would also have desired to escape under similar circumstances; but he would have so desired because he could not endure to be looked upon in his difficulties by the people of the house, and because his imagination would have painted the horrors of a policeman dragging him off with a black eye and a torn coat. There was no one to see him now, and no policeman to take offence. Therefore he rushed to the earl's assistance, brandishing his stick, and roaring in emulation of the bull.

When the animal saw with what unfairness he was

treated, and that the number of his foes was doubled, while no assistance had lent itself on his side, he stood for a while, disgusted by the injustice of humanity. He stopped, and throwing his head up to the heavens, bellowed out his complaint. "Don't come close!" said the earl, who was almost out of breath. "Keep a little apart. Ugh! ugh! Whoop, whoop!" And he threw up his arms manfully, jobbing about with his spud, ever and anon rubbing the perspiration from off his eyebrows with the back of his hand.

As the bull stood pausing, meditating whether under such circumstances flight would not be preferable to gratified passion, Eames made a rush in at him, attempting to hit him on the head. The earl, seeing this, advanced a step also, and got his spud almost up to the animal's eye. But these indignities the beast could not stand. He made a charge, bending his head first towards John Eames, and then, with that weak vacillation which is as disgraceful in a bull as in a general, he changed his purpose, and turned his horns upon his other enemy. The consequence was that his steps carried him in between the two, and that the earl and Eames found themselves for a while behind his tail.

"Now for the gate," said the earl.

"Slowly does it; slowly does it; don't run!" said Johnny, assuming in the heat of the moment a tone of counsel which would have been very foreign to him under other circumstances.

The earl was not a whit offended. "All right," said he, taking with a backward motion the direction of the gate. Then as the bull again faced towards him, he jumped from the ground, labouring painfully with arms and legs, and ever keeping his spud well advanced

against the foe. Eames, holding his position a little apart from his friend, stooped low and beat the ground with his stick, and as though defying the creature. The bull felt himself defied, stood still and roared, and then made another vacillating attack.

"Hold on till we reach the gate," said Eames.

"Ugh! ugh! Whoop! whoop!" shouted the earl. And so gradually they made good their ground.

"Now get over," said Eames, when they had both reached the corner of the field in which the gate stood.

"And what 'll you do?" said the earl.

"I 'll go at the hedge to the right." And Johnny as he spoke dashed his stick about, so as to monopolise, for a moment, the attention of the brute. The earl made a spring at the gate, and got well on to the upper rung. The bull seeing that his prey was going, made a final rush upon the earl and struck the timber furiously with his head, knocking his lordship down on the other side. Lord De Guest was already over, but not off the rail; and thus, though he fell, he fell in safety on the sward beyond the gate. He fell in safety, but utterly exhausted. Eames, as he had purposed, made a leap almost sideways at a thick hedge which divided the field from one of the Guestwick copses. There was a fairly broad ditch, and on the other side a quickset hedge, which had, however, been weakened and injured by trespassers at this corner, close to the gate. Eames was young and active and jumped well. He jumped so well that he carried his body full into the middle of the quickset, and then scrambled through to the other side, not without much injury to his clothes, and some damage also to his hands and face.

The beast, recovering from his shock against the wooden bars, looked wistfully at his last retreating enemy, as he still struggled amidst the bushes. He looked at the ditch and at the broken hedge, but he did not understand how weak were the impediments in his way. He had knocked his head against the stout timber, which was strong enough to oppose him, but was dismayed by the brambles which he might have trodden under foot without an effort. How many of us are like the bull, turning away conquered by opposition which should be as nothing to us, and breaking our feet, and worse still, our hearts, against rocks of adamant. The bull at last made up his mind that he did not dare to face the hedge; so he gave one final roar, and then turning himself round, walked placidly back amidst the herd.

Johnny made his way on to the road by a stile that led out of the copse, and was soon standing over the earl, while the blood ran down his cheeks from the scratches. One of the legs of his trousers had been caught by a stake, and was torn from the hip downward, and his hat was left in the field, the only trophy for the bull. "I hope you 're not hurt, my lord," he said.

"Oh, dear, no; but I 'm terribly out of breath. Why, you 're bleeding all over. He did n't get at you, did he?"

"It 's only the thorns in the hedge," said Johnny, passing his hand over his face. "But I 've lost my hat."

"There are plenty more hats," said the earl.

"I think I 'll have a try for it," said Johnny, with whom the means of getting hats had not been so plenti-

ful as with the earl. "He looks quiet now." And he moved towards the gate.

But Lord De Guest jumped upon his feet, and seized the young man by the collar of his coat. "Go after your hat!" said he. "You must be a fool to think of it. If you 're afraid of catching cold, you shall have mine."

"I 'm not the least afraid of catching cold," said Johnny. "Is he often like that, my lord?" And he made a motion with his head towards the bull.

"The gentlest creature alive; he 's a lamb generally, —just like a lamb. Perhaps he saw my red pocket-handkerchief." And Lord De Guest showed his friend that he carried such an article. "But where should I have been if you had n't come up?"

"You 'd have got to the gate, my lord."

"Yes; with my feet foremost, and four men carrying me. I 'm very thirsty. You don't happen to carry a flask, do you?"

"No, my lord, I don't."

"Then we 'll make the best of our way home, and have a glass of wine there." And on this occasion his lordship intended that his offer should be accepted.

CHAPTER II.

LORD DE GUEST AT HOME.

THE earl and John Eames, after their escape from the bull, walked up to the Manor House together. "You can write a note to your mother, and I 'll send it by one of the boys," said the earl. This was his lordship's answer when Eames declined to dine at the Manor House, because he would be expected home.

"But I 'm so badly off for clothes, my lord," pleaded Johnny. "I tore my trousers in the hedge."

"There will be nobody there beside us two and Dr. Crofts. The doctor will forgive you when he hears the story; and as for me, I did n't care if you had n't a stitch to your back. You 'll have company back to Guestwick, so come along."

Eames had no further excuse to offer, and therefore did as he was bidden. He was by no means as much at home with the earl now as during those minutes of the combat. He would rather have gone home, being somewhat ashamed of being seen in his present tattered and bare-headed condition by the servants of the house; and moreover, his mind would sometimes revert to the scene which had taken place in the garden at Allington. But he found himself obliged to obey the earl, and so he walked on with him through the woods.

The earl did not say very much, being tired and somewhat thoughtful. In what little he did say he seemed to be specially hurt by the ingratitude of the bull towards himself. "I never teased him, or annoyed him in any way."

"I suppose they are dangerous beasts?" said Eames.

"Not a bit of it, if they 're properly treated. It must have been my handkerchief, I suppose. I remember that I did blow my nose."

He hardly said a word in the way of thanks to his assistant. "Where should I have been if you had not come to me?" he had exclaimed immediately after his deliverance; but having said that he did n't think it necessary to say much more to Eames. But he made himself very pleasant, and by the time he had reached the house his companion was almost glad that he had been forced to dine at the Manor House. "And now we 'll have a drink," said the earl. "I don't know how you feel, but I never was so thirsty in my life."

Two servants immediately showed themselves, and evinced some surprise at Johnny's appearance. "Has the gentleman hurt hisself, my lord?" asked the butler, looking at the blood upon our friend's face.

"He has hurt his trousers the worst, I believe," said the earl. "And if he was to put on any of mine they 'd be too short and too big, would n't they? I am sorry you should be so uncomfortable, but you must n't mind it for once."

"I don't mind it a bit," said Johnny.

"And I 'm sure I don't," said the earl. "Mr. Eames is going to dine here, Vickers."

"Yes, my lord."

"And his hat is down in the middle of the nineteen acres. Let three or four men go for it."

"Three or four men, my lord!"

"Yes,—three or four men. There 's something gone wrong with that bull. And you must get a boy with a pony to take a note into Guestwick, to Mrs. Eames. Oh, dear, I 'm better now," and he put down the tumbler from which he 'd been drinking. "Write your note here, and then we 'll go and see my pet pheasants before dinner."

Vickers and the footman knew that something had happened of much moment, for the earl was usually very particular about his dinner-table. He expected every guest who sat there to be dressed in such guise as the fashion of the day demanded; and he himself, though his morning costume was by no means brilliant never dined, even when alone, without having put himself into a suit of black, with a white cravat, and having exchanged the old silver hunting-watch which he carried during the day tied round his neck by a bit of old ribbon, for a small gold watch, with a chain and seals, which in the evening always dangled over his waistcoat. Dr. Gruffen had once been asked to dinner at Guestwick Manor. "Just a bachelor's chop," said the earl; "for there 's nobody at home but myself." Whereupon Dr. Gruffen had come in coloured trousers, —and had never again been asked to dine at Guestwick Manor. All this Vickers knew well; and now his lordship had brought young Eames home to dine with him with his clothes all hanging about him in a manner which Vickers declared in the servants' hall was n't more than half decent. Therefore, they all knew that something very particular must have hap-

pened. "It 's some trouble about the bull, I know," said Vickers;—"but bless you, the bull could n't have tore his things in that way!"

Eames wrote his note, in which he told his mother that he had had an adventure with Lord De Guest, and that his lordship had insisted on bringing him home to dinner. "I have torn my trousers all to pieces," he added in a postscript, "and have lost my hat. Everything else is all right." He was not aware that the earl also sent a short note to Mrs. Eames.

"Dear Madam" (ran the earl's note),—"Your son has, under Providence, probably saved my life. I will leave the story for him to tell. He has been good enough to accompany me home, and will return to Guestwick after dinner with Dr. Crofts, who dines here. I congratulate you on having a son with so much cool courage and good feeling.

"Your very faithful servant,

"De Guest.

"Guestwick Manor, Thursday, October, 186—."

And then they went to see the pheasants. "Now, I 'll tell you what," said the earl. "I advise you to take to shooting. It 's the amusement of a gentleman when a man chances to have the command of game."

"But I 'm always up in London."

"No, you 're not. You 're not up in London now. You always have your holidays. If you choose to try it, I 'll see that you have shooting enough while you 're here. It 's better than going to sleep under the trees. Ha, ha, ha! I wonder what made you lay yourself down there. You had n't been fighting a bull that day?"

"No, my lord. I had n't seen the bull then."

"Well; you think of what I have been saying. When I say a thing, I mean it. You shall have shooting enough if you have a mind to try it." Then they looked at the pheasants, and pottered about the place till the earl said it was time to dress for dinner. "That 's hard upon you, is n't it?" said he. "But, at any rate, you can wash your hands, and get rid of the blood. I 'll be down in the little drawing-room five minutes before seven, and I suppose I 'll find you there."

At five minutes before seven Lord De Guest came into the small drawing-room, and saw Johnny seated there, with a book before him. The earl was a little fussy, and showed by his manner that he was not quite at his ease, as some men do when they have any piece of work on hand which is not customary to them. He held something in his hand, and shuffled a little as he made his way up the room. He was dressed, as usual, in black; but his gold chain was not, as usual, dangling over his waistcoat.

"Eames," he said, "I want you to accept a little present from me,—just as a memorial of our affair with the bull. It will make you think of it sometimes, when I 'm perhaps gone."

"Oh, my lord——"

"It 's my own watch, that I have been wearing for some time; but I 've got another; two or three, I believe, somewhere upstairs. You must n't refuse me. I can't bear being refused. There are two or three little seals, too, which I have worn. I have taken off the one with my arms, because that 's of no use to you, and it is to me. It does n't want a key, but winds up at the handle, in this way," and the earl proceeded to explain the nature of the toy.

"My lord, you think too much of what happened to-day," said Eames, stammering.

"No, I don't; I think very little about it. I know what I think of. Put the watch in your pocket before the doctor comes. There; I hear his horse. Why did n't he drive over, and then he could have taken you back?"

"I can walk very well."

"I 'll make that all right. The servant shall ride Crofts's horse, and bring back the little phaeton. How d'you do, doctor? You know Eames, I suppose? You need n't look at him in that way. His leg is not broken; it 's only his trousers." And then the earl told the story of the bull.

"Johnny will become quite a hero in town," said Crofts.

"Yes; I fear he 'll get the most of the credit; and yet I was at it twice as long as he was. I 'll tell you what, young men, when I got to that gate I did n't think I 'd breath enough left in me to get over it. It 's all very well jumping into a hedge when you 're only two-and-twenty; but when a man comes to be sixty he likes to take his time about such things. Dinner ready, is it? So am I. I quite forgot that mutton-chop of yours to-day, doctor. But I suppose a man may eat a good dinner after a fight with a bull?"

The evening passed by without any very pleasurable excitement, and I regret to say that the earl went fast to sleep in the drawing-room as soon as he had swallowed his cup of coffee. During dinner he had been very courteous to both his guests, but towards Eames he had used a good-humoured and almost affectionate familiarity. He had quizzed him for having been

found asleep under the tree, telling Crofts that he had looked very forlorn,—"So that I have n't a doubt about his being in love," said the earl. And he had asked Johnny to tell the name of the fair one, bringing up the remnants of his half-forgotten classicalities to bear out the joke. "If I am to take more of the severe Falernian," said he, laying his hand on the decanter of port, "I must know the lady's name. Whoever she be, I 'm well sure you need not blush for her. What! you refuse to tell! Then I 'll drink no more." And so the earl had walked out of the dining-room; but not till he had perceived by his guest's cheeks that the joke had been too true to be pleasant. As he went, however, he leaned with his hand on Eames's shoulder, and the servants looking on saw that the young man was to be a favourite. "He 'll make him his heir," said Vickers. "I should n't wonder a bit if he don't make him his heir." But to this the footman objected, endeavouring to prove to Mr. Vickers that, in accordance with the law of the land, his lordship's second cousin, once removed, whom the earl had never seen, but whom he was supposed to hate, must be his heir. "A hearl can never choose his own heir, like you or me," said the footman, laying down the law. "Can't he though really, now? That 's very hard on him; is n't it?" said the pretty housemaid. "Psha," said Vickers: "you know nothing about it. My lord could make young Eames his heir to-morrow; that is, the heir of his property. He could n't make him a hearl, because that must go to the heirs of his body. As to his leaving him the place here, I don't just know how that 'd be; and I 'm sure Richard don't."

"But suppose he has n't got any heirs of his body?"

asked the pretty housemaid, who was rather fond of putting down Mr. Vickers.

"He must have heirs of his body," said the butler. "Everybody has 'em. If a man don't know 'em himself, the law finds 'em out." And then Mr. Vickers walked away, avoiding further dispute.

In the mean time, the earl was asleep upstairs, and the two young men from Guestwick did not find that they could amuse themselves with any satisfaction. Each took up a book; but there are times at which a man is quite unable to read, and when a book is only a cover for his idleness or dulness. At last, Dr. Crofts suggested, in a whisper, that they might as well begin to think of going home.

"Eh; yes; what?" said the earl: "I 'm not asleep." In answer to which the doctor said that he thought he 'd go home, if his lordship would let him order his horse. But the earl was again fast bound in slumber, and took no further notice of the proposition.

"Perhaps we could get off without waking him," suggested Eames, in a whisper.

"Eh; what?" said the earl. So they both resumed their books, and submitted themselves to their martyrdom for a further period of fifteen minutes. At the expiration of that time, the footman brought in tea.

"Eh; what? tea!" said the earl. "Yes, we 'll have a little tea. I 've heard every word you 've been saying." It was that assertion on the part of the earl which always made Lady Julia so angry. "You cannot have heard what I have been saying, Theodore, because I have said nothing," she would reply. "But I should have heard it if you had," the earl would rejoin, snappishly. On the present occasion neither

Crofts nor Eames contradicted him, and he took his tea and swallowed it while still three parts asleep.

"If you 'll allow me, my lord, I think I 'll order my horse," said the doctor.

"Yes; horse—yes—" said the earl, nodding.

"But what are you to do, Eames, if I ride?" said the doctor.

"I 'll walk," whispered Eames, in his very lowest voice.

"What—what—what?" said the earl, jumping up on his feet. "Oh, ah, yes; going away, are you? I suppose you might as well, as sit here and see me sleeping. But, doctor—I did n't snore, did I?"

"Only occasionally."

"Not loud, did I? Come, Eames, did I snore loud?"

"Well, my lord, you did snore rather loud two or three times."

"Did I?" said the earl, in a voice of great disappointment. "And yet, do you know, I heard every word you said."

The small phaeton had been already ordered, and the two young men started back to Guestwick together, a servant from the house riding the doctor's horse behind them. "Look here, Eames," said the earl, as they parted on the steps of the hall-door. "You 're going back to town the day after to-morrow, you say, so I shan't see you again?"

"No, my lord," said Johnny.

"Look you here, now. I shall be up for the Cattle-show before Christmas. You must dine with me at my hotel, on the twenty-second of December, Pawkins's, in Jermyn Street; seven o'clock, sharp. Mind

you do not forget, now. Put it down in your pocket-book when you get home. Good-bye, doctor; good-bye. I see I must stick to that mutton chop in the middle of the day." And then they drove off.

"He 'll make him his heir for certain," said Vickers to himself, as he slowly returned to his own quarters.

"You were returning from Allington, I suppose," said Crofts, "when you came across Lord De Guest and the bull?"

"Yes: I just walked over to say good-bye to them."

"Did you find them all well?"

"I only saw one. The other two were out."

"Mrs. Dale, was it?"

"No; it was Lily."

"Sitting alone, thinking of her fine London lover, of course? I suppose we ought to look upon her as a very lucky girl. I have no doubt she thinks herself so."

"I 'm sure I don't know," said Johnny.

"I believe he 's a very good young man," said the doctor; "but I can't say I quite liked his manner."

"I should think not," said Johnny.

"But then in all probability he did not like mine a bit better, or perhaps yours either. And if so it 's all fair."

"I don't see that it 's a bit fair. He 's a snob," said Eames; "and I don't believe that I am." He had taken a glass or two of the earl's "severe Falernian," and was disposed to a more generous confidence, and perhaps also to stronger language, than might otherwise have been the case.

"No; I don't think he is a snob," said Crofts. "Had he been so, Mrs. Dale would have perceived it."

"You 'll see," said Johnny, touching up the earl's

horse with energy as he spoke. "You 'll see. A man who gives himself airs is a snob; and he gives himself airs. And I don't believe he 's a straightforward fellow. It was a bad day for us all when he came among them at Allington."

"I can't say that I see that."

"I do. But mind, I have n't spoken a word of this to any one. And I don't mean. What would be the good? I suppose she must marry him now?"

"Of course she must."

"And be wretched all her life. Oh-h-h-h!" and he muttered a deep groan. "I 'll tell you what it is, Crofts. He is going to take the sweetest girl out of this country that ever was in it, and he don't deserve her."

"I don't think she can be compared to her sister," said Crofts, slowly.

"What; not Lily?" said Eames, as though the proposition made by the doctor were one that could not hold water for a minute.

"I have always thought that Bell was the more admired of the two," said Crofts.

"I 'll tell you what," said Eames. "I have never yet set my eyes on any human creature whom I thought so beautiful as Lily Dale. And now that beast is going to marry her! I 'll tell you what, Crofts; I 'll manage to pick a quarrel with him yet." Whereupon the doctor, seeing the nature of the complaint from which his companion was suffering, said nothing more, either about Lily or about Bell.

Soon after this Eames was at his own door, and was received here by his mother and sister with all the enthusiasm due to a hero. "He has saved the earl's life!"

Mrs. Eames had exclaimed to her daughter on reading Lord De Guest's note. "Oh, goodness!" and she threw herself back upon the sofa almost in a fainting condition.

"Saved Lord De Guest's life!" said Mary.

"Yes—under Providence," said Mrs. Eames, as though that latter fact added much to her son's good deed.

"But how did he do it?"

"By cool courage and good feeling—so his lordship says. But I wonder how he really did do it?"

"Whatever way it was, he 's torn all his clothes and lost his hat," said Mary.

"I don't care a bit about that," said Mrs. Eames. "I wonder whether the earl has any interest at the Income-tax. What a thing it would be if he could get Johnny a step. It would be seventy pounds a year at once. He was quite right to stay and dine when his lordship asked him. And so Dr. Crofts is there. It could n't have been anything in the doctoring way, I suppose."

"No, I should say not; because of what he says of his trousers." And so the two ladies were obliged to wait for John's return.

"How did you do it, John?" said his mother, embracing him, as soon as the door was opened.

"How did you save the earl's life?" said Mary, who was standing behind her mother.

"Would his lordship really have been killed, if it had not been for you?" asked Mrs. Eames.

"And was he very much hurt?" asked Mary.

"Oh, bother!" said Johnny, on whom the results of the day's work, together with the earl's Falernian, had

made some still remaining impression. On ordinary occasions, Mrs. Eames would have felt hurt at being so answered by her son; but at the present moment she regarded him as standing so high in general favour that she took no offence. "Oh, Johnny, do tell us! Of course we must be very anxious to know it all."

"There 's nothing to tell, except that a bull ran at the earl, as I was going by; so I went into the field and helped him, and then he made me stay and dine with him."

"But his lordship says that you saved his life," said Mary.

"Under Providence," added their mother.

"At any rate, he has given me a gold watch and chain," said Johnny, drawing the present out of his pocket. "I wanted a watch badly. All the same, I did n't like taking it."

"It would have been very wrong to refuse," said his mother. "And I am so glad you have been so fortunate. And look here, Johnny: when a friend like that comes in your way, don't turn your back on him." Then, at last, he thawed beneath their kindness, and told them the whole of the story. I fear that in recounting the earl's efforts with the spud, he hardly spoke of his patron with all that deference which would have been appropriate.

CHAPTER III.

MR. PLANTAGENET PALLISER.

A WEEK passed over Mr. Crosbie's head at Courcy Castle without much inconvenience to him from the well-known fact of his matrimonial engagement. Both George De Courcy and John De Courcy had in their different ways charged him with his offence, and endeavoured to annoy him by recurring to the subject; but he did not care much for the wit or malice of George or John De Courcy. The countess had hardly alluded to Lily Dale after those few words which she said on the first day of his visit, and seemed perfectly willing to regard his doings at Allington as the occupation natural to a young man in such a position. He had been seduced down to a dull country house, and had, as a matter of course, taken to such amusements as the place afforded. He had shot the partridges and made love to the young lady, taking those little recreations as compensation for the tedium of the squire's society. Perhaps he had gone a little too far with the young lady; but then no one knew better than the countess how difficult it is for a young man to go far enough without going too far. It was not her business to make herself a censor on a young man's conduct. The blame, no doubt, rested quite as much with Miss Dale as with him. She was quite sorry that any young

lady should be disappointed; but if girls will be imprudent, and set their caps at men above their mark, they must encounter disappointment. With such language did Lady De Courcy speak of the affair among her daughters, and her daughters altogether agreed with her that it was out of the question that Mr. Crosbie should marry Lily Dale. From Alexandrina he encountered during the week none of that raillery which he had expected. He had promised to explain to her before he left the castle all the circumstances of his acquaintance with Lily, and she at last showed herself determined to demand the fulfilment of this promise; but, previous to that, she said nothing to manifest either offence or a lessened friendship. And I regret to say, that in the intercourse which had taken place between them, that friendship was by no means less tender than it had been in London.

"And when will you tell me what you promised?" she asked him one afternoon, speaking in a low voice, as they were standing together at the window of the billiard-room, in that idle half-hour which always occurs before the necessity for dinner preparation has come. She had been riding and was still in her habit, and he had returned from shooting. She knew that she looked more than ordinarily well in her tall straight hat and riding gear, and was wont to hang about the house, walking skilfully with her upheld drapery, during this period of the day. It was dusk, but not dark, and there was no artificial light in the billiard-room. There had been some pretence of knocking about the balls, but it had been only pretence. "Even Diana," she had said, "could not have played billiards in a habit." Then she had put down her mace, and they

had stood talking together in the recess of a large bow-window.

"And what did I promise?" said Crosbie.

"You know well enough. Not that it is a matter of any special interest to me; only, as you undertook to promise, of course my curiosity has been raised."

"If it be of no special interest," said Crosbie, "you will not object to absolve me from my promise."

"That is just like you," she said. "And how false you men always are. You made up your mind to buy my silence on a distasteful subject by pretending to offer me your future confidence; and now you tell me that you do not mean to confide in me."

"You begin by telling me that the matter is one that does not in the least interest you."

"That is so false again! You know very well what I meant. Do you remember what you said to me the day you came? and am I not bound to tell you after that, that your marriage with this or that young lady is not matter of special interest to me? Still, as your friend——"

"Well, as my friend!"

"I shall be glad to know——. But I am not going to beg for your confidence; only I tell you this fairly, that no man is so mean in my eyes, as a man who fights under false colours."

"And am I fighting under false colours?"

"Yes, you are." And now, as she spoke, the Lady Alexandrina blushed beneath her hat; and dull as was the remaining light of the evening, Crosbie, looking into her face, saw her heightened colour. "Yes, you are. A gentleman is fighting under false colours who comes into a house like this, with a public rumour of

his being engaged, and then conducts himself as though nothing of the kind existed. Of course, it is not anything to me specially; but that is fighting under false colours. Now, sir, you may redeem the promise you made me when you first came here,—or you may let it alone."

It must be acknowledged that the lady was fighting her battle with much courage, and also with some skill. In three or four days Crosbie would be gone; and this victory, if it were ever to be gained, must be gained in those three or four days. And if there were to be no victory, then it would be only fair that Crosbie should be punished for his duplicity, and that she should be avenged as far as any revenge might be in her power. Not that she meditated any deep revenge, or was prepared to feel any strong anger. She liked Crosbie as well as she had ever liked any man. She believed that he liked her also. She had no conception of any very strong passion, but conceived that a married life was more pleasant than one of single bliss. She had no doubt that he had promised to make Lily Dale his wife, but so had he previously promised her, or nearly so. It was a fair game, and she would win it if she could. If she failed, she would show her anger; but she would show it in a mild, weak manner, —turning up her nose at Lily before Crosbie's face, and saying little things against himself behind his back. Her wrath would not carry her much beyond that.

"Now, sir, you may redeem the promise you made me when you first came here,—or you may let it alone." So she spoke and then she turned her face away from him, gazing out into the darkness.

"Alexandrina!" he said.

"Well, sir? But you have no right to speak to me in that style. You know that you have no right to call me by my name in that way!"

"You mean that you insist upon your title?"

"All ladies insist on what you call their title, from gentlemen, except under the privilege of greater intimacy than you have the right to claim. You did not call Miss Dale by her Christian name till you had obtained permission, I suppose?"

"You used to let me call you so."

"Never! Once or twice, when you have done so, I have not forbidden it, as I should have done. Very well, sir, as you have nothing to tell me, I will leave you. I must confess that I did not think you were such a coward." And she prepared to go, gathering up the skirts of her habit, and taking up the whip which she had laid on the window-sill.

"Stay a moment, Alexandrina," he said; "I am not happy, and you should not say words intended to make me more miserable."

"And why are you unhappy?"

"Because—— I will tell you instantly, if I may believe that I am telling you only, and not the whole household."

"Of course I shall not talk of it to others. Do you think that I cannot keep a secret?"

"It is because I have promised to marry one woman, and because I love another. I have told you everything now; and if you choose to say again that I am fighting under false colours I will leave the castle before you can see me again."

"Mr. Crosbie?"

"Now you know it all, and may imagine whether or

no I am very happy. I think you said it was time to dress;—suppose we go?" And without further speech the two went off to their separate rooms.

Crosbie, as soon as he was alone in his chamber, sat himself down in his arm-chair, and went to work striving to make up his mind as to his future conduct. It must not be supposed that the declaration just made by him had been produced solely by his difficulty at the moment. The atmosphere of Courcy Castle had been at work upon him for the last week past. And every word that he had heard, and every word that he had spoken, had tended to destroy all that was good and true within him, and to foster all that was selfish and false. He had said to himself a dozen times during that week that he never could be happy with Lily Dale, and that he never could make her happy. And then he had used the old sophistry in his endeavour to teach himself that it was right to do that which he wished to do. Would it not be better for Lily that he should desert her, than marry her against the dictates of his own heart? And if he really did not love her, would he not be committing a greater crime in marrying her than in deserting her? He confessed to himself that he had been very wrong in allowing the outer world to get such a hold upon him, that the love of a pure girl like Lily could not suffice for his happiness. But there was the fact, and he found himself unable to contend against it. If by any absolute self-sacrifice he could secure Lily's well being, he would not hesitate for a moment. But would it be well to sacrifice her as well as himself?

He had discussed the matter in this way within his own breast, till he had almost taught himself to believe

that it was his duty to break off his engagement with Lily; and he had almost taught himself to believe that a marriage with a daughter of the house of Courcy would satisfy his ambition and assist him in his battle with the world. That Lady Alexandrina would accept him he felt certain, if he could only induce her to forgive him for his sin in becoming engaged to Miss Dale. How very prone she would be to forgiveness in this matter, he had not divined, having not as yet learned how easily such a woman can forgive such a sin, if the ultimate triumph be accorded to herself.

And there was another reason which operated much with Crosbie, urging him on in his present mood and wishes, though it should have given an exactly opposite impulse to his heart. He had hesitated as to marrying Lily Dale at once, because of the smallness of his income. Now he had a prospect of considerable increase to that income. One of the commissioners at his office had been promoted to some greater commissionership, and it was understood by everybody that the secretary at the General Committee Office would be the new commissioner. As to that there was no doubt. But then the question had arisen as to the place of secretary. Crosbie had received two or three letters on the subject, and it seemed that the likelihood of his obtaining this step in the world was by no means slight. It would increase his official income from seven hundred a year to twelve, and would place him altogether above the world. His friend, the present secretary, had written to him, assuring him that no other probable competitor was spoken of as being in the field against him. If such good fortune awaited him, would it not smooth any present difficulty which

lay in the way of his marriage with Lily Dale? But, alas, he had not looked at the matter in that light! Might not the countess help him to this preferment? And if his destiny intended for him the good things of this world,—secretaryships, commissionerships, chairmanships, and such like, would it not be well that he should struggle on in his upward path by such assistance as good connections might give him?

He sat thinking over it all in his own room on that evening. He had written twice to Lily since his arrival at Courcy Castle. His first letter has been given. His second was written much in the same tone; though Lily, as she had read it, had unconsciously felt somewhat less satisfied than she had been with the first. Expressions of love were not wanting, but they were vague and without heartiness. They savoured of insincerity, though there was nothing in the words themselves to convict them. Few liars can lie with the full roundness and self-sufficiency of truth; and Crosbie, bad as he was, had not yet become bad enough to reach that perfection. He had said nothing to Lily of the hopes of promotion which had been opened to him; but he had again spoken of his own worldliness—acknowledging that he received an unsatisfying satisfaction from the pomps and vanities of Courcy Castle. In fact he was paving the way for that which he had almost resolved that he would do, now he had told Lady Alexandrina that he loved her; and he was obliged to confess to himself that the die was cast.

As he thought of all this, there was not wanting to him some of the satisfaction of an escape. Soon after making that declaration of love at Allington he had begun to feel that in making it he had cut his throat.

He had endeavoured to persuade himself that he could live comfortably with his throat cut in that way; and as long as Lily was with him he would believe that he could do so; but as soon as he was again alone he would again accuse himself of suicide. This was his frame of mind even while he was yet at Allington, and his ideas on the subject had become stronger during his sojourn at Courcy. But the self-immolation had not been completed, and he now began to think that he could save himself. I need hardly say that this was not all triumph to him. Even had there been no material difficulty as to his desertion of Lily,—no uncle, cousin, and mother whose anger he must face,—no vision of a pale face, more eloquent of wrong in its silence than even uncle, cousin, and mother, with their indignant storm of words,—he was not altogether heartless. How should he tell all this to the girl who had loved him so well; who had so loved him, that, as he himself felt, her love would fashion all her future life either for weal or for woe? "I am unworthy of her, and will tell her so," he said to himself. How many a false hound of a man has endeavoured to salve his own conscience by such mock humility? But he acknowledged at this moment, as he rose from his seat to dress himself, that the die was cast, and that it was open to him now to say what he pleased to Lady Alexandrina. "Others have gone through the same fire before," he said to himself, as he walked downstairs, "and have come out scathless." And then he recalled to himself the names of various men of high repute in the world who were supposed to have committed in their younger days some such little mistake as that into which he had been betrayed.

In passing through the hall he overtook Lady Julia De Guest, and was in time to open for her the door of the drawing-room. He then remembered that she had come into the billiard-room at one side, and had gone out at the other, while he was standing with Alexandrina at the window. He had not, however, then thought much of Lady Julia; and as he now stood for her to pass by him through the doorway, he made to her some indifferent remark.

But Lady Julia was on some subjects a stern woman, and not without a certain amount of courage. In the last week she had seen what had been going on, and had become more and more angry. Though she had disowned any family connection with Lily Dale, nevertheless she now felt for her sympathy and almost affection. Nearly every day she had repeated stiffly to the countess some incident of Crosbie's courtship and engagement to Miss Dale,—speaking of it as with absolute knowledge, as a thing settled at all points. This she had done to the countess alone, in the presence of the countess and Alexandrina, and also before all the female guests of the castle. But what she had said was received simply with an incredulous smile. "Dear me! Lady Julia," the countess had replied at last, "I shall begin to think you are in love with Mr. Crosbie yourself; you harp so constantly on this affair of his. One would think that young ladies in your part of the world must find it very difficult to get husbands, seeing that the success of one young lady is trumpeted so loudly." For the moment, Lady Julia was silenced; but it was not easy to silence her altogether when she had a subject for speech near her heart.

Almost all the Courcy world were assembled in the

drawing-room as she now walked into the room with Crosbie at her heels. When she found herself near the crowd she turned round, and addressed him in a voice more audible than that generally required for purposes of drawing-room conversation. "Mr. Crosbie," she said, "have you heard lately from our dear friend, Lily Dale?" And she looked him full in the face, in a manner more significant, probably, than even she had intended it to be. There was, at once, a general hush in the room, and all eyes were turned upon her and upon him.

Crosbie instantly made an effort to bear the attack gallantly, but he felt that he could not quite command his colour, or prevent a sudden drop of perspiration from showing itself upon his brow. "I had a letter from Allington yesterday," he said. "I suppose you have heard of your brother's encounter with the bull?"

"The bull!" said Lady Julia. And it was instantly manifest to all that her attack had been foiled and her flank turned.

"Good gracious! Lady Julia, how very odd you are!" said the countess.

"But what about the bull?" asked the Honourable George.

"It seems that the earl was knocked down in the middle of one of his own fields."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Alexandrina. And sundry other exclamations were made by all the assembled ladies.

"But he was n't hurt," said Crosbie. "A young man named Eames seems to have fallen from the sky and carried off the earl on his back."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" growled the other earl, as he heard of the discomfiture of his brother peer.

Lady Julia, who had received her own letters that day from Guestwick, knew that nothing of importance had happened to her brother; but she felt that she was foiled for that time.

"I hope that there has not really been any accident," said Mr. Gagebee, with a voice of great solicitude.

"My brother was quite well last night, thank you," said she. And then the little groups again formed themselves, and Lady Julia was left alone on the corner of a sofa.

"Was that all an invention of yours, sir?" said Alexandrina to Crosbie.

"Not quite. I did get a letter this morning from my friend Bernard Dale,—that old harridan's nephew; and Lord De Guest has been worried by some of his animals. I wish I had told her that his stupid old neck had been broken."

"Fie, Mr. Crosbie!"

"What business has she to interfere with me?"

"But I mean to ask the same question that she asked, and you won't put me off with a cock-and-bull story like that." But then, as she was going to ask the question, dinner was announced.

"And is it true that De Guest has been tossed by a bull?" said the earl, as soon as the ladies were gone. He had spoken nothing during dinner except what words he had muttered into the ear of Lady Dumbello. It was seldom that conversation had many charms for him in his own house; but there was a savour of pleasantry in the idea of Lord De Guest having been tossed, by which even he was tickled.

"Only knocked down, I believe," said Crosbie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" growled the earl; then he filled his glass, and allowed some one else to pass the bottle. Poor man! There was not much left to him now in the world which did amuse him.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Plantagenet Palliser, who was sitting at the earl's right hand, opposite to Lord Dumbello.

"Don't you?" said the earl. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I 'll be shot if I do. From all I hear De Guest is an uncommon good farmer. And I don't see the joke of tossing a farmer merely because he 's a nobleman also. Do you?" and he turned round to Mr. Gagebee, who was sitting on the other side. The earl was an earl, and was also Mr. Gagebee's father-in-law. Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was the heir to a dukedom. Therefore, Mr. Gagebee merely simpered, and did not answer the question put to him. Mr. Palliser said nothing more about it, nor did the earl; and then the joke died away.

Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was the Duke of Omnium's heir—heir to that nobleman's title and to his enormous wealth; and, therefore, was a man of mark in the world. He sat in the House of Commons, of course. He was about five-and-twenty years of age, and was, as yet, unmarried. He did not hunt or shoot or keep a yacht, and had been heard to say that he had never put a foot upon a race-course in his life. He dressed very quietly, never changing the colour or form of his garments; and in society was quiet, reserved, and very often silent. He was tall, slight, and not ill-looking; but more than this cannot be said for his personal appearance—except, indeed, this, that no one could mis-

take him for other than a gentleman. With his uncle, the duke, he was on good terms—that is to say, they had never quarrelled. A very liberal allowance had been made to the nephew; but the two relatives had no tastes in common, and did not often meet. Once a year Mr. Palliser visited the duke at his great country seat for two or three days, and usually dined with him two or three times during the season in London. Mr. Palliser sat for a borough which was absolutely under the duke's command; but had accepted his seat under the distinct understanding that he was to take whatever part in politics might seem good to himself. Under these well-understood arrangements, the duke and his heir showed to the world quite a pattern of a happy family. "So different to the earl and Lord Porlock!" the people of West Barsetshire used to say. For the estates, both of the duke and of the earl, were situated in the western division of that county.

Mr. Palliser was chiefly known to the world as a rising politician. We may say that he had everything at his command, in the way of pleasure, that the world could offer him. He had wealth, position, power, and the certainty of attaining the highest rank among, perhaps, the most brilliant nobility in the world. He was courted by all who could get near enough to court him. It is hardly too much to say that he might have selected a bride from all that was most beautiful and best among English women. If he would have bought race-horses, and have expended thousands on the turf, he would have gratified his uncle by doing so. He might have been the master of hounds, or the slaughterer of hecatombs of birds. But to none of these things would he devote himself. He had chosen to be a

politician, and in that pursuit he laboured with a zeal and perseverance which would have made his fortune at any profession or in any trade. He was constant in committee-rooms up to the very middle of August. He was rarely absent from any debate of importance, and never from any important division. Though he seldom spoke, he was always ready to speak if his purpose required it. No man gave him credit for any great genius—few even considered that he could become either an orator or a mighty statesman. But the world said that he was a rising man, and old Nestor of the Cabinet looked on him as one who would be able, at some far future day, to come among them as a younger brother. Hitherto he had declined such inferior offices as had been offered to him, biding his time carefully; and he was as yet tied hand and neck to no party, though known to be liberal in all his political tendencies. He was a great reader—not taking up a book here, and another there, as chance brought books before him, but working through an enormous course of books, getting up the great subject of the world's history—filling himself full of facts—though perhaps not destined to acquire the power of using those facts otherwise than as precedents. He strove also diligently to become a linguist—not without success, as far as a competent understanding of various languages. He was a thin-minded, plodding, respectable man, willing to devote all his youth to work, in order that in old age he might be allowed to sit among the Councillors of the State.

Hitherto his name had not been coupled by the world with that of any woman whom he had been supposed to admire; but latterly it had been observed

that he had often been seen in the same room with Lady Dumbello. It had hardly amounted to more than this; but when it was remembered how undemonstrative were the two persons concerned—how little disposed was either of them to any strong display of feeling—even this was thought matter to be mentioned. He certainly would speak to her from time to time almost with an air of interest; and Lady Dumbello, when she saw that he was in the room, would be observed to raise her head with some little show of life, and to look round as though there were something there on which it might be worth her while to allow her eyes to rest. When such innuendoes were abroad, no one would probably make more of them than Lady De Courcy. Many, when they heard that Mr. Palliser was to be at the castle, had expressed their surprise at her success in that quarter. Others, when they learned that Lady Dumbello had consented to become her guest, had also wondered greatly. But when it was ascertained that the two were to be there together, her good-natured friends had acknowledged that she was a very clever woman. To have either Mr. Palliser or Lady Dumbello would have been a feather in her cap; but to succeed in getting both, by enabling each to know that the other would be there, was indeed a triumph. As regards Lady Dumbello, however, the bargain was not fairly carried out; for, after all, Mr. Palliser came to Courcy Castle only for two nights and a day, and during the whole of that day he was closeted with sundry large blue-books. As for Lady De Courcy, she did not care how he might be employed. Blue-books and Lady Dumbello were all the same to her. Mr. Palliser had been at Courcy

Castle, and neither enemy nor friend could deny the fact.

This was his second evening; and as he had promised to meet his constituents at Silverbridge at one P.M. on the following day, with the view of explaining to them his own conduct and the political position of the world in general; and as he was not to return from Silverbridge to Courcy, Lady Dumbello, if she made any way at all, must take advantage of the short gleam of sunshine which the present hour afforded her. No one, however, could say that she showed any active disposition to monopolise Mr. Palliser's attention. When he sauntered into the drawing-room she was sitting alone, in a large, low chair, made without arms, so as to admit the full expansion of her dress, but hollowed and round at the back, so as to afford her the support that was necessary to her. She had barely spoken three words since she had left the dining-room, but the time had not passed heavily with her. Lady Julia had again attacked the countess about Lily Dale and Mr. Crosbie, and Alexandrina, driven almost to rage, had stalked off to the farther end of the room, not concealing her special concern in the matter.

"How I do wish they were married and done with," said the countess; "and then we should hear no more about them."

All of which Lady Dumbello heard and understood; and in all of it she took a certain interest. She remembered such things, learning thereby who was who, and regulating her own conduct by what she learned. She was by no means idle at this or at other such times, going through, we may say, a considerable amount of really hard work in her manner of working.

There she had sat speechless, unless when acknowledging by a low word of assent some expression of flattery from those around her. Then the door opened, and when Mr. Palliser entered she raised her head, and the faintest possible gleam of satisfaction might have been discerned upon her features. But she made no attempt to speak to him; and when, as he stood at the table, he took up a book and remained thus standing for a quarter of an hour, she neither showed nor felt any impatience. After that Lord Dumbello came in, and he stood at the table without a book. Even then Lady Dumbello felt no impatience.

Plantagenet Palliser skimmed through his little book, and probably learned something. When he put it down he sipped a cup of tea, and remarked to Lady De Courcy that he believed it was only twelve miles to Silverbridge.

"I wish it was a hundred and twelve," said the countess.

"In that case I should be forced to start to-night," said Mr. Palliser.

"Then I wish it was a thousand and twelve," said Lady De Courcy.

"In that case I should not have come at all," said Mr. Palliser. He did not mean to be uncivil, and had only stated a fact.

"The young men are becoming absolute bears," said the countess to her daughter Margaretta.

He had been in the room nearly an hour when he did at last find himself standing close to Lady Dumbello: close to her, and without any other very near neighbour.

"I should hardly have expected to find you here," he said.

"Nor I you," she answered.

"Though, for the matter of that, we are both near our own homes."

"I am not near mine."

"I meant Plumstead; your father's place."

"Yes; that was my home once."

"I wish I could show you my uncle's place. The castle is very fine, and he has some good pictures."

"So I have heard."

"Do you stay here long?"

"Oh, no. I go to Cheshire the day after to-morrow. Lord Dumbello is always there when the hunting begins."

"Ah, yes; of course. What a happy fellow he is; never any work to do! His constituents never trouble him, I suppose?"

"I don't think they ever do, much."

After that Mr. Palliser sauntered away again, and Lady Dumbello passed the rest of the evening in silence. It is to be hoped that they both were rewarded by that ten minutes of sympathetic intercourse for the inconvenience which they had suffered in coming to Courcy Castle.

But that which seems so innocent to us had been looked on in a different light by the stern moralists of that house.

"By Jove!" said the Honourable George to his cousin, Mr. Gresham, "I wonder how Dumbello likes it."

"It seems to me that Dumbello takes it very easily."

"There are some men who will take anything easily," said George, who, since his own marriage, had learned to have a holy horror of such wicked things.

"She 's beginning to come out a little," said Lady Clandidlem to Lady De Courcy, when the two old women found themselves together over a fire in some back sitting-room. "Still waters always run deep, you know."

"I should n't at all wonder if she were to go off with him," said Lady De Courcy.

"He 'll never be such a fool as that," said Lady Clandidlem.

"I believe men will be fools enough for anything," said Lady De Courcy. "But, of course, if he did, it would come to nothing afterwards. I know one who would not be sorry. If ever a man was tired of a woman, Lord Dumbello is tired of her."

But in this, as in almost everything else, the wicked old woman spoke scandal. Lord Dumbello was still proud of his wife, and as fond of her as a man can be of a woman whose fondness depends upon mere pride.

There had not been much that was dangerous in the conversation between Mr. Palliser and Lady Dumbello, but I cannot say the same as to that which was going on at the same moment between Crosbie and Lady Alexandrina. She, as I have said, walked away in almost open dudgeon when Lady Julia recommenced her attack about poor Lily, nor did she return to the general circle during the evening. There were two large drawing-rooms at Courcy Castle, joined together by a narrow link of a room, which might have been called a passage, had it not been lighted by two windows coming down to the floor, carpeted as were the drawing-rooms, and warmed with a separate fireplace. Hither she betook herself, and was soon followed by her married sister Amelia.

"That woman almost drives me mad," said Alexandrina, as they stood together with their toes upon the fender.

"But, my dear, you of all people should not allow yourself to be driven mad on such a subject."

"That 's all very well, Amelia."

"The question is this, my dear,—what does Mr. Crosbie mean to do?"

"How should I know?"

"If you don't know, it will be safer to suppose that he is going to marry this girl, and in that case——"

"Well, what in that case? Are you going to be another Lady Julia? What do I care about the girl?"

"I don't suppose you care much about the girl; and if you care as little about Mr. Crosbie, there 's an end of it; only in that case, Alexandrina——"

"Well, what in that case?"

"You know I don't want to preach to you. Can't you tell me at once whether you really like him? You and I have always been good friends." And the married sister put her arm affectionately round the waist of her who wished to be married.

"I like him well enough."

"And has he made any declaration to you?"

"In a sort of way he has. Hark, here he is!" And Crosbie, coming in from the larger room, joined the sisters at the fireplace.

"We were driven away by the clack of Lady Julia's tongue," said the elder.

"I never met such a woman," said Crosbie.

"There cannot well be many like her," said Alexandrina. And after that they all stood silent for a minute or two. Lady Amelia Gagebee was considering

whether or no she would do well to go and leave the two together. If it were intended that Mr. Crosbie should marry her sister, it would certainly be well to give him an opportunity of expressing such a wish on his own part. But if Alexandrina was simply making a fool of herself, then it would be well for her to stay. "I suppose she would rather I should go," said the elder sister to herself; and then, obeying the rule which should guide all our actions from one to another, she went back and joined the crowd.

"Will you come on into the other room?" said Crosbie.

"I think we are very well here," Alexandrina replied.

"But I wish to speak to you,—particularly," said he.

"And cannot you speak here?"

"No. They will be passing backwards and forwards." Lady Alexandrina said nothing further, but led the way into the other large room. That also was lighted, and there were in it four or five persons. Lady Rosina was reading a work on the millennium, with a light to herself in one corner. Her brother John was asleep in an arm-chair, and a young gentleman and lady were playing chess. There was, however, ample room for Crosbie and Alexandrina to take up a position apart.

"And now, Mr. Crosbie, what have you got to say to me? But, first, I mean to repeat Lady Julia's question, as I told you that I should do. When did you hear last from Miss Dale?"

"It is cruel in you to ask me such a question, after what I have already told you. You know that I have given to Miss Dale a promise of marriage."

"Very well, sir. I don't see why you should bring

me in here to tell me anything that is so publicly known as that. With such a herald as Lady Julia it is quite unnecessary."

"If you can only answer me in that tone I will make an end of it at once. When I told you of my engagement, I told you also that another woman possessed my heart. Am I wrong to suppose that you knew to whom I alluded?"

"Indeed, I did not, Mr. Crosbie. I am no conjuror, and I have not scrutinised you so closely as your friend Lady Julia."

"It is you that I love. I am sure I need hardly say so now."

"Hardly, indeed,—considering that you are engaged to Miss Dale."

"As to that I have, of course, to own that I have behaved foolishly;—worse than foolishly, if you choose to say so. You cannot condemn me more absolutely than I condemn myself. But I have made up my mind as to one thing. I will not marry where I do not love." Oh, if Lily could have heard him as he then spoke! "It would be impossible for me to speak in terms too high of Miss Dale; but I am quite sure that I could not make her happy as her husband."

"Why did you not think of that before you asked her?" said Alexandrina. But there was very little of condemnation in her tone.

"I ought to have done so; but it is hardly for you to blame me with severity. Had you, when we were last together in London—had you been less——"

"Less what?"

"Less defiant," said Crosbie, "all this might perhaps have been avoided."

Lady Alexandrina could not remember that she had been defiant; but, however, she let that pass. "Oh, yes; of course it was my fault."

"I went down there to Allington with my heart ill at ease, and now I have fallen into this trouble. I tell you all as it has happened. It is impossible that I should marry Miss Dale. It would be wicked in me to do so, seeing that my heart belongs altogether to another. I have told you who is that other; and now may I hope for an answer?"

"An answer to what?"

"Alexandrina, will you be my wife?"

If it had been her object to bring him to a point-blank declaration and proposition of marriage, she had certainly achieved her object now. And she had that trust in her own power of management and in her mother's, that she did not fear that in accepting him she would incur the risk of being served as he was serving Lily Dale. She knew her own position and his too well for that. If she accepted him she would in due course of time become his wife,—let Miss Dale and all her friends say what they might to the contrary. As to that head she had no fear. But nevertheless she did not accept him at once. Though she wished for the prize, her woman's nature hindered her from taking it when it was offered to her.

"How long is it, Mr. Crosbie," she said, "since you put the same question to Miss Dale?"

"I have told you everything, Alexandrina,—as I promised that I would do. If you intend to punish me for doing so——"

"And I might ask another question. How long will it be before you put the same question to some other girl?"

He turned round as though to walk away from her in anger; but when he had gone half the distance to the door he returned.

"By Heaven!" he said, and he spoke somewhat roughly too, "I 'll have an answer. You at any rate have nothing with which to reproach me. All that I have done wrong, I have done through you, or on your behalf. You have heard my proposal. Do you intend to accept it?"

"I declare you startle me. If you demanded my money or my life, you could not be more imperious."

"Certainly not more resolute in my determination."

"And if I decline the honour?"

"I shall think you the most fickle of your sex."

"And if I were to accept it?"

"I would swear that you were the best, the dearest, and the sweetest of women."

"I would rather have your good opinion than your bad, certainly," said Lady Alexandrina. And then it was understood by both of them that that affair was settled. Whenever she was called on in future to speak of Lily, she always called her, "that poor Miss Dale;" but she never again spoke a word of reproach to her future lord about that little adventure. "I shall tell mamma to-night," she said to him, as she bade him good-night in some sequestered nook to which they had betaken themselves. Lady Julia's eye was again on them as they came out from the sequestered nook, but Alexandrina no longer cared for Lady Julia.

"George, I cannot quite understand about that Mr. Palliser. Is n't he to be a duke, and ought n't he to be a lord now?" This question was asked by Mrs. George De Courcy of her husband, when they found

themselves together in the seclusion of the nuptial chamber.

"Yes; he 'll be Duke of Omnium when the old fellow dies. I think he 's one of the slowest fellows I ever came across. He 'll take deuced good care of the property, though."

"But, George, do explain it to me. It is so stupid not to understand, and I am afraid of opening my mouth for fear of blundering."

"Then keep your mouth shut, my dear. You 'll learn all those sort of things in time, and nobody notices it if you don't say anything."

"Yes, but George;—I don't like to sit silent all the night. I 'd sooner be up here with a novel if I can't speak about anything."

"Look at Lady Dumbello. She does n't want to be always talking."

"Lady Dumbello is very different from me. But do tell me, who is Mr. Palliser?"

"He 's the duke's nephew. If he were the duke's son, he would be the Marquis of Silverbridge."

"And will he be plain Mister till his uncle dies?"

"Yes, a very plain Mister."

"What a pity for him. But, George,—if I have a baby, and if he should be a boy, and if——"

"Oh, nonsense; it will be time enough to talk of that when he comes. I 'm going to sleep."

CHAPTER IV.

A MOTHER-IN-LAW AND A FATHER-IN-LAW.

On the following morning Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was off upon his political mission before breakfast; either that, or else some private comfort was afforded to him in guise of solitary rolls and coffee. The public breakfast at Courcy Castle was going on at eleven o'clock, and at that hour Mr. Palliser was already closeted with the mayor of Silverbridge.

"I must get off by the 3.45 train," said Mr. Palliser. "Who is there to speak after me?"

"Well, I shall say a few words; and Growdy,—he 'll expect them to listen to him. Growdy has always stood very firm by his grace, Mr. Palliser."

"Mind we are in the room sharp at one. And you can have a fly, for me to get away to the station, ready in the yard. I won't go a moment before I can help. I shall be just an hour and a half myself. No, thank you, I never take any wine in the morning." And I may here state that Mr. Palliser did get away by the 3.45 train, leaving Mr. Growdy still talking on the platform. Constituents must be treated with respect; but time has become so scarce now-a-days that that respect has to be meted out by the quarter of an hour with parsimonious care.

In the mean time there was more leisure at Courcy

Castle. Neither the countess nor Lady Alexandrina came down to breakfast, but their absence gave rise to no special remark. Breakfast at the castle was a morning meal at which people showed themselves, or did not show themselves, as it pleased them. Lady Julia was there looking very glum, and Crosbie was sitting next to his future sister-in-law Margaretta, who already had placed herself on terms of close affection with him. As he finished his tea she whispered into his ear, "Mr. Crosbie, if you could spare half an hour, mamma would so like to see you in her own room." Crosbie declared that he would be delighted to wait upon her, and did in truth feel some gratitude in being welcomed as a son-in-law into the house. And yet he felt also that he was being caught, and that in ascending into the private domains of the countess he would be setting the seal upon his own captivity.

Nevertheless, he went with a smiling face and a light step, Lady Margaretta ushering him the way. "Mamma," said she; "I have brought Mr. Crosbie up to you. I did not know that you were here, Alexandrina, or I should have warned him."

The countess and her youngest daughter had been breakfasting together in the elder lady's sitting-room, and were now seated in a very graceful and well-arranged deshabille. The tea-cups out of which they had been drinking were made of some elegant porcelain, the teapot and cream-jug were of chased silver and as delicate in their way. The remnant of food consisted of morsels of French roll which had not even been allowed to crumble themselves in a disorderly fashion, and of infinitesimal pats of butter. If the morning meal of the two ladies had been as unsub-

stantial as the appearance of the fragments indicated, it must be presumed that they intended to lunch early. The countess herself was arrayed in an elaborate morning wrapper of figured silk, but the simple Alexandrina wore a plain white muslin peignoir, fastened with pink ribbon. Her hair, which she usually carried in long rolls, now hung loose over her shoulders, and certainly added something to her stock of female charms. The countess got up as Crosbie entered, and greeted him with an open hand; but Alexandrina kept her seat, and merely nodded at him a little welcome. "I must run down again," said Margaretta, "or I shall have left Amelia with all the cares of the house upon her."

"Alexandrina has told me all about it," said the countess, with her sweetest smile; "and I have given her my approval. I really do think you will suit each other very well."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Crosbie. "I 'm sure at any rate of this,—that she will suit me very well."

"Yes; I think she will. She is a good sensible girl."

"Psha, mamma; pray don't go on in that Goody Twoshoes sort of way."

"So you are, my dear. If you were not it would not be well for you to do as you are going to do. If you were giddy and harum-scarum, and devoted to rank and wealth and that sort of thing, it would not be well for you to marry a commoner without fortune. I 'm sure Mr. Crosbie will excuse me for saying so much as that."

"Of course I know," said Crosbie, "that I had no right to look so high."

"Well; we 'll say nothing more about it," said the countess.

"Pray don't," said Alexandrina. "It sounds so like a sermon."

"Sit down, Mr. Crosbie," said the countess, "and let us have a little conversation. She shall sit by you, if you like it. Nonsense, Alexandrina,—if he asks it!"

"Don't, mamma;—I mean to remain where I am."

"Very well, my dear;—then remain where you are. She is a wilful girl, Mr. Crosbie; as you will say when you hear that she has told me all that you told her last night." Upon hearing this, he changed colour a little, but said nothing. "She has told me," continued the countess, "about that young lady at Allington. Upon my word, I 'm afraid you have been very naughty."

"I have been foolish, Lady De Courcy."

"Of course; I did not mean anything worse than that. Yes, you have been foolish;—amusing yourself in a thoughtless way, you know, and, perhaps, a little piqued because a certain lady was not to be won so easily as your Royal Highness wished. Well, now, all that must be settled, you know, as quickly as possible. I don't want to ask any indiscreet questions; but if the young lady has really been left with any idea that you meant anything, don't you think you should undeceive her at once?"

"Of course he will, mamma."

"Of course you will; and it will be a great comfort to Alexandrina to know that the matter is arranged. You hear what Lady Julia is saying almost every hour of her life. Now, of course, Alexandrina does not care what an old maid like Lady Julia may say; but it will

be better for all parties that the rumour should be put a stop to. If the earl were to hear it, he might, you know——" And the countess shook her head, thinking that she could thus best indicate what the earl might do, if he were to take it into his head to do anything.

Crosbie could not bring himself to hold any very confidential intercourse with the countess about Lily; but he gave a muttered assurance that he should, as a matter of course, make known the truth to Miss Dale with as little delay as possible. He could not say exactly when he would write, nor whether he would write to her or to her mother; but the thing should be done immediately on his return to town.

"If it will make the matter easier, I will write to Mrs. Dale," said the countess. But to this scheme Mr. Crosbie objected very strongly.

And then a few words were said about the earl. "I will tell him this afternoon," said the countess; "and then you can see him to-morrow morning. I don't suppose he will say very much, you know; and perhaps he may think,—you won't mind my saying it, I 'm sure,—that Alexandrina might have done better. But I don't believe that he 'll raise any strong objection. There will be something about settlements, and that sort of thing, of course." Then the countess went away, and Alexandrina was left with her lover for half an hour. When the half-hour was over, he felt that he would have given all that he had in the world to have back the last four-and-twenty hours of his existence. But he had no hope. To jilt Lily Dale would, no doubt, be within his power, but he knew that he could not jilt Lady Alexandrina De Courcy.

On the next morning at twelve o'clock he had his interview with the father, and a very unpleasant interview it was. He was ushered into the earl's room, and found the great peer standing on the rug, with his back to the fire, and his hands in his breeches pockets.

"So you mean to marry my daughter?" said he. "I 'm not very well, as you see; I seldom am."

These last words were spoken in answer to Crosbie's greeting. Crosbie had held out his hand to the earl, and had carried his point so far that the earl had been forced to take one of his own out of his pocket, and give it to his proposed son-in-law.

"If your lordship has no objection. I have, at any rate, her permission to ask for yours."

"I believe you have not any fortune, have you? She 's got none; of course you know that?"

"I have a few thousand pounds, and I believe she has as much."

"About as much as will buy bread to keep the two of you from starving. It 's nothing to me. You can marry her if you like; only, look here, I 'll have no nonsense. I 've had an old woman in with me this morning,—one of those that are here in the house,—telling me some story about some other girl that you have made a fool of. It 's nothing to me how much of that sort of thing you may have done, so that you do none of it here. But,—if you play any prank of that kind with me, you 'll find that you 've made a mistake."

Crosbie hardly made any answer to this, but got himself out of the room as quickly as he could.

"You 'd better talk to Gagebee about the trifle of money you 've got," said the earl. Then he dismissed

the subject from his mind, and no doubt imagined that he had fully done his duty by his daughter.

On the day after this, Crosbie was to go. On the last afternoon, shortly before dinner, he was waylaid by Lady Julia, who had passed the day in preparing traps to catch him.

"Mr. Crosbie," she said, "let me have one word with you. Is this true?"

"Lady Julia," he said, "I really do not know why you should inquire into my private affairs."

"Yes, sir, you do know; you know very well. That poor young lady who has no father and no brother, is my neighbour, and her friends are my friends. She is a friend of my own, and being an old woman, I have a right to speak for her. If this is true, Mr. Crosbie, you are treating her like a villain."

"Lady Julia, I really must decline to discuss the matter with you."

"I 'll tell everybody what a villain you are; I will, indeed;—a villain and a poor, weak, silly fool. She was too good for you; that 's what she was." Crosbie, as Lady Julia was addressing to him the last words, hurried upstairs away from her, but her ladyship, standing on a landing-place, spoke up loudly, so that no word should be lost on her retreating enemy.

"We positively must get rid of that woman," the countess, who heard it all, said to Margaretta. "She is disturbing the house and disgracing herself every day."

"She went to papa this morning, mamma."

"She did not get much by that move," said the countess.

On the following morning Crosbie returned to town,

but just before he left the castle he received a third letter from Lily Dale. "I have been rather disappointed at not hearing this morning," said Lily, "for I thought the postman would have brought me a letter. But I know you 'll be a better boy when you get back to London, and I won't scold you. Scold you, indeed! No; I 'll never scold you, not though I should n't hear for a month."

He would have given all that he had in the world, three times told, if he could have blotted out that visit to Courcy Castle from the past facts of his existence.

CHAPTER V.

ADOLPHUS CROSBIE SPENDS AN EVENING AT HIS CLUB.

Crosbie, as he was being driven from the castle to the nearest station, in a dog-cart hired from the hotel, could not keep himself from thinking of that other morning, not yet a fortnight past, on which he had left Allington; and as he thought of it he knew that he was a villain. On this morning Alexandrina had not come out from the house to watch his departure, and catch the last glance of his receding figure. As he had not started very early she had sat with him at the breakfast table; but others also had sat there, and when he got up to go, she did no more than smile softly and give him her hand. It had been already settled that he was to spend his Christmas at Courcy; as it had been also settled that he was to spend it at Allington.

Lady Amelia was, of all the family, the most affectionate to him, and perhaps of them all she was the one whose affection was worth the most. She was not a woman endowed with a very high mind or with very noble feelings. She had begun life trusting to the nobility of her blood for everything, and declaring somewhat loudly among her friends that her father's rank and her mother's birth imposed on her the duty of standing closely by her own order. Nevertheless,

at the age of thirty-three she had married her father's man of business, under circumstances which were not altogether creditable to her. But she had done her duty in her new sphere of life with some constancy and a fixed purpose; and now that her sister was going to marry, as she had done, a man much below herself in social standing, she was prepared to do her duty as a sister and a sister-in-law.

"We shall be up in town in November, and of course you 'll come to us at once. Albert Villa, you know, in Hamilton Terrace, St. John's wood. We dine at seven, and on Sundays at two; and you 'll always find a place. Mind you come to us, and make yourself quite at home. I do so hope you and Mortimer will get on well together."

"I 'm sure we shall," said Crosbie. But he had had higher hopes in marrying into this noble family than that of becoming intimate with Mortimer Gagebee. What those hopes were he could hardly define to himself now that he had brought himself so near to the fruition of them. Lady De Courcy had certainly promised to write to her first cousin who was Under-Secretary of State for India, with reference to that secretaryship at the General Committee Office; but Crosbie, when he came to weigh in his mind what good might result to him from this, was disposed to think that his chance of obtaining the promotion would be quite as good without the interest of the Under-Secretary of State for India as with it. Now that he belonged, as we may say, to this noble family, he could hardly discern what were the advantages which he had expected from this alliance. He had said to himself that it would be much to have a countess for a mother-

in-law; but now, even already, although the possession to which he had looked was not yet garnered, he was beginning to tell himself that the thing was not worth possessing.

As he sat in the train, with a newspaper in his hand, he went on acknowledging to himself that he was a villain. Lady Julia had spoken the truth to him on the stairs at Courcy, and so he confessed over and over again. But he was chiefly angry with himself for this, —that he had been a villain without gaining anything by his villainy; that he had been a villain, and was to lose so much by his villainy. He made comparison between Lily and Alexandrina, and owned to himself, over and over again, that Lily would make the best wife that a man could take to his bosom. As to Alexandrina, he knew the thinness of her character. She would stick by him, no doubt; and in a circuitous, discontented, unhappy way, would probably be true to her duties as a wife and mother. She would be nearly such another as Lady Amelia Gagebee. But was that a prize sufficiently rich to make him contented with his own prowess and skill in winning it? And was that a prize sufficiently rich to justify him to himself for his terrible villainy? Lily Dale he had loved; and he now declared to himself that he could have continued to love her through his whole life. But what was there for any man to love in Alexandrina De Courcy?

While resolving, during his first four or five days at the castle, that he would throw Lily Dale overboard, he had contrived to quiet his conscience by inward allusions to sundry heroes of romance. He had thought of Lothario, Don Juan, and of Lovelace; and had told himself that the world had ever been full of such heroes.

And the world, too, had treated such heroes well; not punishing them at all as villains, but caressing them rather, and calling them curled darlings. Why should not he be a curled darling as well as another? Ladies had ever been fond of the Don Juan character, and Don Juan had generally been popular with men also. And then he named to himself a dozen modern Lotharios,—men who were holding their heads well above water, although it was known that they had played this lady false, and brought that other one to death's door, or perhaps even to death itself. War and love were alike, and the world was prepared to forgive any guile to militants in either camp.

But now that he had done the deed he found himself forced to look at it from quite another point of view. Suddenly that character of Lothario showed itself to him in a different light, and one in which it did not please him to look at it as belonging to himself. He began to feel that it would be almost impossible for him to write that letter to Lily, which it was absolutely necessary that he should write. He was in a position in which his mind would almost turn itself to thoughts of self-destruction as the only means of escape. A fortnight ago he was a happy man, having everything before him that a man ought to want; and now—now that he was the accepted son-in-law of an earl, and the confident expectant of high promotion—he was the most miserable, degraded wretch in the world!

He changed his clothes at his lodgings in Mount Street and went down to his club to dinner. He could do nothing that night. His letter to Allington must, no doubt, be written at once; but, as he could not

send it before the next night's post, he was not forced to set to work upon it that evening. As he walked along Piccadilly on his way to St. James's Square, it occurred to him that it might be well to write a short line to Lily, telling her nothing of the truth,—a note written as though his engagement with her was still unbroken, but yet written with care, saying nothing about that engagement, so as to give him a little time. Then he thought that he would telegraph to Bernard and tell everything to him. Bernard would, of course, be prepared to avenge his cousin in some way, but for such vengeance Crosbie felt that he should care little. Lady Julia had told him that Lily was without father or brother, thereby accusing him of the basest cowardice. "I wish she had a dozen brothers," he said to himself. But he hardly knew why he expressed such a wish.

He returned to London on the last day of October, and he found the streets at the West End nearly deserted. He thought, therefore, that he should be quite alone at his club, but as he entered the dinner room he saw one of his oldest and most intimate friends standing before the fire. Fowler Pratt was the man who had first brought him into Sebright's, and had given him almost his earliest start on his successful career in life. Since that time he and his friend Fowler Pratt had lived in close communion, though Pratt had always held a certain ascendency in their friendship. He was in age a few years senior to Crosbie, and was in truth a man of better parts. But he was less ambitious, less desirous of shining in the world, and much less popular with men in general. He was possessed of a moderate private fortune on which he lived in a quiet, modest manner, and was unmarried,

not likely to marry, inoffensive, useless, and prudent. For the first few years of Crosbie's life in London he had lived very much with his friend Pratt, and had been accustomed to depend much on his friend's counsel; but latterly, since he had himself become somewhat noticeable, he had found more pleasure in the society of such men as Dale, who were not his superiors either in age or wisdom. But there had been no coolness between him and Pratt, and now they met with perfect cordiality.

"I thought you were down in Barsetshire," said Pratt.

"And I thought you were in Switzerland."

"I have been in Switzerland," said Pratt.

"And I have been in Barsetshire," said Crosbie. Then they ordered their dinner together.

"And so you 're going to be married?" said Pratt, when the waiter had carried away the cheese.

"Who told you that?"

"Well, but you are? Never mind who told me, if I was told the truth."

"But if it be not true?"

"I have heard it for the last month," said Pratt, "and it has been spoken of as a thing certain; and it is true; is it not?"

"I believe it is," said Crosbie, slowly.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you, that you speak of it in that way? Am I to congratulate you, or am I not? The lady, I 'm told, is a cousin of Dale's."

Crosbie had turned his chair from the table round to the fire, and said nothing in answer to this. He sat with his glass of sherry in his hand, looking at the coals,

and thinking whether it would not be well that he should tell the whole story to Pratt. No one could give him better advice; and no one, as far as he knew his friend, would be less shocked at the telling of such a story. Pratt had no romance about women, and had never pretended to very high sentiments.

"Come up into the smoking-room and I 'll tell you all about it," said Crosbie. So they went off together, and, as the smoking-room was untenanted, Crosbie was able to tell his story.

He found it very hard to tell;—much harder than he had beforehand fancied. "I have got into terrible trouble," he began by saying. Then he told how he had fallen suddenly in love with Lily, how he had been rash and imprudent, how nice she was—"infinitely too good for such a man as I am," he said;—how she had accepted him, and then how he had repented. "I should have told you beforehand," he then said, "that I was already half engaged to Lady Alexandrina De Courcy." The reader, however, will understand that this half-engagement was a fiction.

"And now you mean that you are altogether engaged to her?"

"Exactly so."

"And that Miss Dale must be told that, on second thoughts, you have changed your mind?"

"I know that I have behaved very badly," said Crosbie.

"Indeed you have," said his friend.

"It is one of those troubles in which a man finds himself involved almost before he knows where he is."

"Well; I can't look at it exactly in that light. A man may amuse himself with a girl, and I can under-

stand his disappointing her and not offering to marry her,—though even that sort of thing is n't much to my taste. But, by George, to make an offer of marriage to such a girl as that in September, to live for a month in her family as her affianced husband, and then coolly go away to another house in October, and make an offer to another girl of higher rank——"

"You know very well that that has had nothing to do with it."

"It looks very like it. And how are you going to communicate these tidings to Miss Dale?"

"I don't know," said Crosbie, who was beginning to be very sore.

"And you have quite made up your mind that you 'll stick to the earl's daughter?"

The idea of jilting Alexandrina instead of Lily had never as yet presented itself to Crosbie, and now, as he thought of it, he could not perceive that it was feasible.

"Yes," he said, "I shall marry Lady Alexandrina; —that is, if I do not cut the whole concern, and my own throat into the bargain."

"If I were in your shoes I think I should cut the whole concern. I could not stand it. What do you mean to say to Miss Dale's uncle?"

"I don't care a —— for Miss Dale's uncle," said Crosbie. "If he were to walk in at that door this moment, I would tell him the whole story, without——"

As he was yet speaking, one of the club servants opened the door of the smoking-room, and seeing Crosbie seated in a lounging-chair near the fire, went up to him with a gentleman's card. Crosbie took the card and read the name—"Mr. Dale, Allington."

"The gentleman is in the waiting-room," said the servant.

Crosbie for the moment was struck dumb. He had declared that very moment that he should feel no personal disinclination to meet Mr. Dale, and now that gentleman was within the walls of the club, waiting to see him!

"Who 's that?" asked Pratt. And then Crosbie handed him the card. "Whew-w-w-hew," whistled Pratt.

"Did you tell the gentleman I was here?" asked Crosbie.

"I said I thought you were upstairs, sir."

"That will do," said Pratt. "The gentleman will no doubt wait for a minute." And then the servant went out of the room. "Now, Crosbie, you must make up your mind. By one of these women and all her friends you will ever be regarded as a rascal, and they of course will look out to punish you with such punishment as may come to their hands. You must now choose which shall be the sufferer."

The man was a coward at heart. The reflection that he might, even now, at this moment, meet the old squire on pleasant terms,—or at any rate not on terms of defiance, pleaded more strongly in Lily's favour than had any other argument since Crosbie had first made up his mind to abandon her. He did not fear personal ill-usage;—he was not afraid lest he should be kicked or beaten; but he did not dare to face the just anger of the angry man.

"If I were you," said Pratt, "I would not go down to that man at the present moment for a trifle."

"But what can I do?"

"Shirk away out of the club. Only if you do that it seems to me that you 'll have to go on shirking for the rest of your life."

"Pratt, I must say that I expected something more like friendship from you."

"What can I do for you? There are positions in which it is impossible to help a man. I tell you plainly that you have behaved very badly. I do not see that I can help you."

"Would you see him?"

"Certainly not, if I am to be expected to take your part."

"Take any part you like,—only tell him the truth."

"And what is the truth?"

"I was part engaged to that other girl before; and then, when I came to think of it, I knew that I was not fit to marry Miss Dale. I know I have behaved badly; but, Pratt, thousands have done the same thing before."

"I can only say that I have not been so unfortunate as to reckon any of those thousands among my friends."

"You mean to tell me, then, that you are going to turn your back on me?" said Crosbie.

"I have n't said anything of the kind. I certainly won't undertake to defend you, for I don't see that your conduct admits of defence. I will see this gentleman if you wish it, and tell him anything that you may desire me to tell him."

At this moment the servant returned with a note for Crosbie. Mr. Dale had called for paper and envelope, and sent up to him the following missive:—"Do you intend to come down to me? I know that you are in the house." "For Heaven's sake go to him," said Crosbie. "He is well aware that I was deceived about

his niece,—that I thought he was to give her some fortune. He knows all about that, and that when I learned from him that she was to have nothing——"

"Upon my word, Crosbie, I wish you could find another messenger."

"Ah! you do not understand," said Crosbie in his agony. "You think that I am inventing this plea about her fortune now. It is n't so. He will understand. We have talked all this over before, and he knew how terribly I was disappointed. Shall I wait for you here, or will you come to my lodgings? Or I will go down to the Beaufort, and will wait for you there." And it was finally arranged that he should get himself out of this club and wait at the other for Pratt's report of the interview.

"Do you go down first," said Crosbie.

"Yes: I had better," said Pratt. "Otherwise you may be seen. Mr. Dale would have his eye upon you, and there would be a row in the house." There was a smile of sarcasm on Pratt's face as he spoke which angered Crosbie even in his misery, and made him long to tell his friend that he would not trouble him with this mission,—that he would manage his own affairs himself; but he was weakened and mentally humiliated by the sense of his own rascality, and had already lost the power of asserting himself, and of maintaining his ascendency. He was beginning to recognise the fact that he had done that for which he must endure to be kicked, to be kicked morally if not materially; and that it was no longer possible for him to hold his head up without shame.

Pratt took Mr. Dale's note in his hand and went down into the stranger's room. There he found the

squire standing, so that he could see through the open door of the room to the foot of the stairs down which Crosbie must descend before he could leave the club. As a measure of first precaution the ambassador closed the door; then he bowed to Mr. Dale, and asked him if he would take a chair.

"I wanted to see Mr. Crosbie," said the squire.

"I have your note to that gentleman in my hand," said he. "He has thought it better that you should have this interview with me;—and under all the circumstances perhaps it is better."

"Is he such a coward that he dare not see me?"

"There are some actions, Mr. Dale, that will make a coward of any man. My friend Crosbie is, I take it, brave enough in the ordinary sense of the word, but he has injured you."

"It is all true, then?"

"Yes, Mr. Dale; I fear it is all true."

"And you call that man your friend! Mr. ——; I don't know what your name is."

"Pratt;—Fowler Pratt; I have known Crosbie for fourteen years,—ever since he was a boy; and it is not my way, Mr. Dale, to throw over an old friend under any circumstances."

"Not if he committed a murder?"

"No; not though he committed a murder."

"If what I hear is true, this man is worse than a murderer."

"Of course, Mr. Dale, I cannot know what you have heard. I believe that Mr. Crosbie has behaved very badly to your niece, Miss Dale; I believe that he was engaged to marry her, or, at any rate, that some such proposition had been made."

"Proposition! Why, sir, it was a thing so completely understood that everybody knew it in the county. It was so positively fixed that there was no secret about it. Upon my honour, Mr. Pratt, I can't as yet understand it. If I remember right, it 's not a fortnight since he left my house at Allington,—not a fortnight. And that poor girl was with him on the morning of his going as his betrothed bride. Not a fortnight since! And now I 've had a letter from an old family friend telling me that he is going to marry one of Lord De Courcy's daughters! I went instantly off to Courcy, and found that he had started for London. Now, I have followed him here; and you tell me it 's all true."

"I am afraid it is, Mr. Dale; too true."

"I don't understand it; I don't, indeed. I cannot bring myself to believe that the man who was sitting the other day at my table should be so great a scoundrel. Did he mean it all the time that he was there?"

"No; certainly not. Lady Alexandrina De Courcy was, I believe, an old friend of his;—with whom, perhaps, he had had some lover's quarrel. On his going to Courcy they made it up; and this is the result."

"And that is to be sufficient for my poor girl?"

"You will, of course, understand that I am not defending Mr. Crosbie. The whole affair is very sad,—very sad, indeed. I can only say, in his excuse, that he is not the first man who has behaved badly to a lady."

"And that is his message to me, is it? And that is what I am to tell my niece? You have been deceived by a scoundrel. But what then? You are not the first! Mr. Pratt, I give you my word as a gentleman, I do not understand it. I have lived a good deal out

of the world, and am therefore, perhaps, more astonished than I ought to be."

"Mr. Dale, I feel for you——"

"Feel for me! What is to become of my girl? And do you suppose that I will let this other marriage go on; that I will not tell the De Courcys, and all the world at large, what sort of a man this is;—that I will not get at him to punish him? Does he think that I will put up with this?"

"I do not know what he thinks; I must only beg that you will not mix me up in the matter—as though I were a participator in his offence."

"Will you tell him from me that I desire to see him?"

"I do not think that that would do any good."

"Never mind, sir; you have brought me this message; will you have the goodness now to take back mine to him?"

"Do you mean at once—this evening,—now?"

"Yes, at once—this evening,—now;—this minute."

"Ah! he has left the club; he is not here now; he went when I came to you."

"Then he is a coward as well as a scoundrel." In answer to which assertion, Mr. Fowler Pratt merely shrugged his shoulders.

"He is a coward as well as a scoundrel. Will you have the kindness to tell your friend from me that he is a coward and a scoundrel,—and a liar, sir."

"If it be so, Miss Dale is well quit of her engagement."

"That is your consolation, is it? That may be all very well now-a-days; but when I was a young man, I would sooner have burnt out my tongue than have

spoken in such a way on such a subject. I would, indeed. Good-night, Mr. Pratt. Pray make your friend understand that he has not yet seen the last of the Dales; although, as you hint, the ladies of that family will no doubt have learned that he is not fit to associate with them." Then, taking up his hat, the squire made his way out of the club.

"I would not have done it," said Pratt to himself, "for all the beauty, and all the wealth, and all the rank that ever were owned by a woman."

CHAPTER VI.

LORD DE COURCY IN THE BOSOM OF HIS FAMILY.

Lady Julia De Guest had not during her life written many letters to Mr. Dale of Allington, nor had she ever been very fond of him. But when she felt certain how things were going at Courcy, or rather, as we may say, how they had already gone, she took pen in hand, and sat herself to work, doing, as she conceived, her duty by her neighbour.

"My dear Mr. Dale" (she said),—"I believe I need make no secret of having known that your niece Lilian is engaged to Mr. Crosbie, of London. I think it proper to warn you that if this be true Mr. Crosbie is behaving himself in a very improper manner here. I am not a person who concerns myself much in the affairs of other people; and under ordinary circumstances, the conduct of Mr. Crosbie would be nothing to me,—or, indeed, less than nothing; but I do to you as I would wish that others should do unto me. I believe it is only too true that Mr. Crosbie has proposed to Lady Alexandrina De Courcy, and been accepted by her. I think you will believe that I would not say this without warrant, and if there be anything in it, it may be well, for the poor young lady's sake, that you should put yourself in the way of learning the truth.

"Believe me to be yours sincerely,

"Julia De Guest.

"Courcy Castle, Thursday."

The squire had never been very fond of any of the De Guest family, and had, perhaps, liked Lady Julia the least of them all. He was wont to call her a meddling old woman,—remembering her bitterness and pride in those now long bygone days in which the gallant major had run off with Lady Fanny. When he first received this letter, he did not, on the first reading of it, believe a word of its contents. "Cross-grained old harridan," he said out loud to his nephew. "Look what that aunt of yours has written to me." Bernard read the letter twice, and as he did so his face became hard and angry.

"You don't mean to say you believe it?" said the squire.

"I don't think it will be safe to disregard it."

"What! you think it possible that your friend is doing as she says."

"It is certainly possible. He was angry when he found that Lily had no fortune."

"Heavens, Bernard! And you can speak of it in that way?"

"I don't say that it is true; but I think we should look to it. I will go to Courcy Castle and learn the truth."

The squire at last decided that he would go. He went to Courcy Castle, and found that Crosbie had started two hours before his arrival. He asked for Lady Julia, and learned from her that Crosbie had actually left the house as the betrothed husband of Lady Alexandrina.

"The countess, I am sure, will not contradict it, if you will see her," said Lady Julia. But this the squire was unwilling to do. He would not proclaim the

wretched condition of his niece more loudly than was necessary, and therefore he started on his pursuit of Crosbie. What was his success on that evening we have already learned.

Both Lady Alexandrina and her mother heard of Mr. Dale's arrival at the castle, but nothing was said between them on the subject. Lady Amelia Gagebee heard of it also, and she ventured to discuss the matter with her sister.

"You don't know exactly how far it went, do you?"

"No; yes;—not exactly, that is," said Alexandrina.

"I suppose he did say something about marriage to the girl?"

"Yes, I 'm afraid he did."

"Dear, dear! It 's very unfortunate. What sort of people are those Dales! I suppose he talked to you about them."

"No, he did n't; not very much. I dare say she is an artful, sly thing! It 's a great pity men should go on in such a way."

"Yes, it is," said Lady Amelia. "And I do suppose that in this case the blame has been more with him than with her. It 's only right I should tell you that."

"But what can I do?"

"I don't say you can do anything; but it 's as well you should know."

"But I don't know, and you don't know; and I can't see that there is any use talking about it now. I knew him a long while before she did, and if she has allowed him to make a fool of her, it is n't my fault."

"Nobody says it is, my dear."

"But you seem to preach to me about it. What

can I do for the girl? The fact is, he don't care for her a bit, and never did."

"Then he should n't have told her that he did."

"That 's all very well, Amelia; but people don't always do exactly all that they ought to do. I suppose Mr. Crosbie is n't the first man that has proposed to two ladies. I dare say it was wrong, but I can't help it. As to Mr. Dale coming here with a tale of his niece's wrongs, I think it very absurd,—very absurd indeed. It makes it look as though there had been a scheme to catch Mr. Crosbie, and it 's my belief that there was such a scheme."

"I only hope that there 'll be no quarrel."

"Men don't fight duels now-a-days, Amelia."

"But do you remember what Frank Gresham did to Mr. Moffat when he behaved so badly to poor Augusta?"

"Mr. Crosbie is n't afraid of that kind of thing. And I always thought that Frank was very wrong,—very wrong indeed. What 's the good of two men beating each other in the street?"

"Well; I 'm sure I hope there 'll be no quarrel. But I own I don't like the look of it. You see the uncle must have known all about it, and have consented to the marriage, or he would not have come here."

"I don't see that it can make any difference to me, Amelia."

"No, my dear, I don't see that it can. We shall be up in town soon, and I will see as much as possible of Mr. Crosbie. The marriage, I hope, will take place soon."

"He talks of February."

"Don't put it off, Alley, whatever you do. There are so many slips, you know, in these things."

"I 'm not a bit afraid of that," said Alexandrina, sticking up her head.

"I dare say not; and you may be sure that we will keep an eye on him. Mortimer will get him up to dine with us as often as possible, and as his leave of absence is all over, he can't get out of town. He is to be here at Christmas, is n't he?"

"Of course he is."

"Mind you keep him to that. And as to these Dales, I would be very careful, if I were you, not to say anything unkind of them to any one. It sounds badly in your position." And with this last piece of advice Lady Amelia Gagebee allowed the subject to drop.

On that day Lady Julia returned to her own home. Her adieux to the whole family at Courcy Castle were very cold, but about Mr. Crosbie and his lady-love at Allington she said no further word to any of them. Alexandrina did not show herself at all on the occasion, indeed had not spoken to her enemy since that evening on which she had felt herself constrained to retreat from the drawing-room.

"Good-bye," said the countess. "You have been so good to come, and we have enjoyed it so much."

"I thank you very much. Good-morning," said Lady Julia, with a stately courtesy.

"Pray remember me to your brother. I wish we could have seen him; I hope he has not been hurt by the—the bull." And then Lady Julia went her way.

"What a fool I have been to have that woman in the house," said the countess, before the door was closed behind her guest's back.

"Indeed you have," said Lady Julia, screaming back through the passage. Then there was a long silence, then a suppressed titter, and after that a loud laugh.

"Oh, mamma, what shall we do?" said Lady Amelia.

"Do!" said Margaretta; "why should we do anything? She has heard the truth for once in her life."

"Dear Lady Dumbello, what will you think of us?" said the countess, turning round to another guest, who was also just about to depart. "Did any one ever know such a woman before."

"I think she 's very nice," said Lady Dumbello, smiling.

"I can't quite agree with you there," said Lady Clandidlem. "But I do believe she means to do her best. She is very charitable, and all that sort of thing."

"I 'm sure I don't know," said Rosina. "I asked her for a subscription to the mission for putting down the Papists in the west of Ireland, and she refused me point-blank."

"Now, my dear, if you 're quite ready," said Lord Dumbello, coming into the room. Then there was another departure; but on this occasion the countess waited till the doors were shut, and the retreating footsteps were no longer heard. "Have you observed," said she to Lady Clandidlem, "that she has not held her head up since Mr. Palliser went away?"

"Indeed I have," said Lady Clandidlem. "As for poor Dumbello, he 's the blindest creature I ever saw in my life."

"We shall hear of something before next May," said Lady De Courcy, shaking her head; "but for all that she 'll never be Duchess of Omnium."

"I wonder what your mamma will say of me when I go away to-morrow," said Lady Clandidlem to Margaretta, as they walked across the hall together.

"She won't say that you are going to run away with any gentleman," said Margaretta.

"At any rate not with the earl," said Lady Clandidlem. "Ha! ha! ha! Well, we are all very good-natured, are we not? The best is that it means nothing."

Thus by degrees all the guests went, and the family of the De Courcys was left to the bliss of their own domestic circle. This, we may presume, was not without its charms, seeing that there were so many feelings in common between the mother and her children. There were drawbacks to it, no doubt, arising, perhaps, chiefly from the earl's bodily infirmities. "When your father speaks to me," said Mrs. George to her husband, "he puts me in such a shiver that I cannot open my mouth to answer him."

"You should stand up to him," said George. "He can't hurt you, you know. Your money 's your own; and if I 'm ever to be the heir, it won't be by his doing."

"But he gnashes his teeth at me."

"You should n't care for that, if he don't bite. He used to gnash them at me; and when I had to ask him for money I did n't like it; but now I don't mind him a bit. He threw the peerage at me one day, but it did n't go within a yard of my head."

"If he throws anything at me, George, I shall drop upon the spot."

But the countess had a worse time with the earl than any of her children. It was necessary that she

should see him daily, and necessary also that she should say much that he did not like to hear, and make many petitions that caused him to gnash his teeth. The earl was one of those men who could not endure to live otherwise than expensively, and yet was made miserable by every recurring expense. He ought to have known by this time that butchers, and bakers, and corn-chandlers, and coal-merchants will not supply their goods for nothing; and yet it always seemed as though he had expected that at this special period they would do so. He was an embarrassed man, no doubt, and had not been fortunate in his speculations at Newmarket or Homburg; but, nevertheless, he had still the means of living without daily torment; and it must be supposed that his self-imposed sufferings, with regard to money, rose rather from his disposition than his necessities. His wife never knew whether he were really ruined, or simply pretending it. She had now become so used to her position in this respect, that she did not allow fiscal considerations to mar her happiness. Food and clothing had always come to her,—including velvet gowns, new trinkets, and a man-cook,—and she presumed that they would continue to come. But that daily conference with her husband was almost too much for her. She struggled to avoid it; and, as far as the ways and means were concerned, would have allowed them to arrange themselves, if he would only have permitted it. But he insisted on seeing her daily in his own sitting-room; and she had acknowledged to her favourite daughter, Margaretta, that those half-hours would soon be the death of her. "I sometimes feel," she said, "that I am going mad before I can get out." And she reproached herself, probably

without reason, in that she had brought much of this upon herself. In former days the earl had been constantly away from home, and the countess had complained. Like many other women she had not known when she was well off. She had complained, urging upon her lord that he should devote more of his time to his own hearth. It is probable that her ladyship's remonstrances had been less efficacious than the state of his own health in producing that domestic constancy which he now practised; but it is certain that she looked back with bitter regret to the happy days when she was deserted, jealous, and querulous. "Don't you wish we could get Sir Omicron to order him to the German Spas?" she had said to Margaretta. Now Sir Omicron was the great London physician, and might, no doubt, do much in that way.

But no such happy order had as yet been given; and, as far as the family could foresee, paterfamilias intended to pass the winter with them at Courcy. The guests, as I have said, were all gone and none but the family were in the house when her ladyship waited upon her lord one morning at twelve o'clock, a few days after Mr. Dale's visit to the castle. He always breakfasted alone, and after breakfast found in a French novel and a cigar what solace those innocent recreations were still able to afford him. When the novel no longer excited him and when he was saturated with smoke, he would send for his wife. After that his valet would dress him. "She gets it worse than I do," the man declared in the servants' hall; "and minds it a deal more. I can give warning, and she can't."

"Better? No, I ain't better," the husband said, in

answer to his wife's inquiries. "I never shall be better while you keep that cook in the kitchen."

"But where are we to get another if we send him away?"

"It 's not my business to find cooks. I don't know where you 're to get one. It 's my belief you won't have a cook at all before long. It seems you have got two extra men into the house without telling me."

"We must have servants, you know, when there is company. It would n't do to have Lady Dumbello here, and no one to wait on her."

"Who asked Lady Dumbello? I did n't."

"I 'm sure, my dear, you liked having her here."

"D—— Lady Dumbello!" and then there was a pause. The countess had no objection whatsoever to the above proposition, and was rejoiced that that question of the servants was allowed to slip aside, through the aid of her ladyship.

"Look at that letter from Porlock," said the earl; and he pushed over to the unhappy mother a letter from her eldest son. Of all her children he was the one she loved the best; but him she was never allowed to see under her own roof. "I sometimes think that he is the greatest rascal with whom I ever had occasion to concern myself," said the earl.

She took the letter and read it. The epistle was certainly not one which a father could receive with pleasure from his son; but the disagreeable nature of its contents was the fault rather of the parent than of the child. The writer intimated that certain money due to him had not been paid with necessary punctuality, and that unless he received it, he should instruct his lawyer to take some authorised legal proceedings.

Lord De Courcy had raised certain moneys on the family property, which he could not have raised without the co-operation of his heir, and had bound himself, in return for that co-operation, to pay a certain fixed income to his eldest son. This he regarded as an allowance from himself; but Lord Porlock regarded it as his own, by lawful claim. The son had not worded his letter with any affectionate phraseology. "Lord Porlock begs to inform Lord De Courcy——" Such had been the commencement.

"I suppose he must have his money; else how can he live?" said the countess, trembling.

"Live!" shouted the earl. "And so you think it proper that he should write such a letter as that to his father!"

"It is all very unfortunate," she replied.

"I don't know where the money's to come from. As for him, if he were starving, it would serve him right. He 's a disgrace to the name and the family. From all I hear, he won't live long."

"Oh, De Courcy, don't talk of it in that way!"

"What way am I to talk of it? If I say that he 's my greatest comfort, and living as becomes a nobleman, and is a fine, healthy man of his age, with a good wife and a lot of legitimate children, will that make you believe it? Women are such fools. Nothing that I say will make him worse than he is."

"But he may reform."

"Reform! He 's over forty, and when I last saw him he looked nearly sixty. There;—you may answer his letter; I won't."

"And about the money?"

"Why does n't he write to Gagebee about his dirty

money? Why does he trouble me? I have n't got his money. Ask Gagebee about his money. I won't trouble myself about it." Then there was another pause, during which the countess folded the letter, and put it in her pocket.

"How long is George going to remain here with that woman?" he asked.

"I 'm sure she is very harmless," pleaded the countess.

"I always think when I see her that I 'm sitting down to dinner with my own housemaid. I never saw such a woman. How he can put up with it! But I don't suppose he cares for anything."

"It has made him very steady."

"Steady!"

"And as she will be confined before long it may be as well that she should remain here. If Porlock does n't marry, you know——"

"And so he means to live here altogether, does he? I 'll tell you what it is,—I won't have it. He 's better able to keep a house over his own head and his wife's than I am to do it for them, and so you may tell them. I won't have it. D'ye hear?" Then there was another short pause. "D'ye hear?" he shouted at her.

"Yes; of course I hear. I was only thinking you would n't wish me to turn them out, just as her confinement is coming on."

"I know what that means. Then they 'd never go. I won't have it; and if you don't tell them, I will." In answer to this Lady De Courcy promised that she would tell them, thinking, perhaps, that the earl's mode of telling might not be beneficial in that

particular epoch which was now coming in the life of Mrs. George.

"Did you know," said he, breaking out on a new subject, "that a man had been here named Dale, calling on somebody in this house?" In answer to which the countess acknowledged that she had known it.

"Then why did you keep it from me?" And that gnashing of the teeth took place which was so specially objectionable to Mrs. George.

"It was a matter of no moment. He came to see Lady Julia De Guest."

"Yes; but he came about that man Crosbie."

"I suppose he did."

"Why have you let that girl be such a fool? You 'll find he 'll play her some knave's trick."

"Oh, dear, no!"

"And why should she want to marry such a man as that?"

"He 's quite a gentleman, you know, and very much thought of in the world. It won't be at all bad for her, poor thing. It is so very hard for a girl to get married now-a-days without money."

"And so they 're to take up with anybody. As far as I can see, this is a worse affair than that of Amelia."

"Amelia has done very well, my dear."

"Oh, if you call it doing well for your girls, I don't. I call it doing uncommon badly; about as bad as they well can do. But it 's your affair. I have never meddled with them, and don't intend to do it now."

"I really think she 'll be happy, and she is devotedly attached to the young man."

"Devotedly attached to the young man!" The tone and manner in which the earl repeated these words

were such as to warrant an opinion that his lordship might have done very well on the stage had his attention been called to that profession. "It makes me sick to hear people talk in that way. She want's to get married, and she 's a fool for her pains;—I can't help that; only remember that I 'll have no nonsense here about that other girl. If he gives me trouble of that sort, by —— I 'll be the death of him. When is the marriage to be?"

"They talk of February."

"I won't have any tomfoolery and expense. If she chooses to marry a clerk in an office, she shall marry him as clerks are married."

"He 'll be the secretary before that, De Courcy."

"What difference does that make? Secretary, indeed! What sort of men do you suppose secretaries are? A beggar that came from nobody knows where! I won't have any tomfoolery;—d'ye hear?" Whereupon the countess said that she did hear, and soon afterwards managed to escape. The valet then took his turn; and repeated, after his hour of service, that "Old Nick" in his tantrums had been more like the Prince of Darkness than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

"ON MY HONOUR, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT."

In the mean time Lady Alexandrina endeavoured to realise to herself all the advantages and disadvantages of her own position. She was not possessed of strong affections, nor of depth of character, nor of high purpose; but she was no fool, nor was she devoid of principle. She had asked herself many times whether her present life was so happy as to make her think that a permanent continuance in it would suffice for her desires, and she had always replied to herself that she would fain change to some other life if it were possible. She had also questioned herself as to her rank, of which she was quite sufficiently proud, and had told herself that she could not degrade herself in the world without a heavy pang. But she had at last taught herself to believe that she had more to gain by becoming the wife of such a man as Crosbie than by remaining as an unmarried daughter of her father's house. There was much in her sister Amelia's position which she did not envy, but there was less to envy in that of her sister Rosina. The Gagebee house in St. John's Wood Road was not so magnificent as Courcy Castle; but then it was less dull, less embittered by torment, and was moreover her sister's own.

"Very many do marry commoners," she had said to Margaretta.

"Oh, yes, of course. It makes a difference, you know, when a man has a fortune."

Of course it did make a difference. Crosbie had no fortune, was not even so rich as Mr. Gagebee, could keep no carriage, and would have no country house. But then he was a man of fashion, was more thought of in the world than Mr. Gagebee, might probably rise in his own profession,—and was at any rate thoroughly presentable. She would have preferred a gentleman with 5000*l.* a year; but then as no gentleman with 5000*l.* a year came that way, would she not be happier with Mr. Crosbie than she would be with no husband at all? She was not very much in love with Mr. Crosbie, but she thought that she could live with him comfortably, and that on the whole it would be a good thing to be married.

And she made certain resolves as to the manner in which she would do her duty by her husband. Her sister Amelia was paramount in her own house, ruling indeed with a moderate, endurable dominion, and ruling much to her husband's advantage. Alexandrina feared that she would not be allowed to rule, but she could at any rate try. She would do all in her power to make him comfortable, and would be specially careful not to irritate him by any insistance on her own higher rank. She would be very meek in this respect; and if children should come she would be as painstaking about them as though her own father had been merely a clergyman or a lawyer. She thought also much about poor Lilian Dale, asking herself sundry questions, with an idea of being high-principled as to her duty in that respect. Was she wrong in taking Mr. Crosbie away from Lilian Dale? In answer to

these questions she was able to assure herself comfortably that she was not wrong. Mr. Crosbie would not, under any circumstances, marry Lilian Dale. He had told her so more than once, and that in a solemn way. She could therefore be doing no harm to Lilian Dale. If she entertained any inner feeling that Crosbie's fault in jilting Lilian Dale was less than it would have been had she herself not been an earl's daughter,—that her own rank did in some degree extenuate her lover's falseness,—she did not express it in words even to herself.

She did not get very much sympathy from her own family. "I 'm afraid he does not think much of his religious duties. I 'm told that young men of that sort seldom do," said Rosina. "I don't say you 're wrong," said Margaretta. "By no means. Indeed I think less of it now than I did when Amelia did the same thing. I should n't do it myself, that 's all." Her father told her that he supposed she knew her own mind. Her mother, who endeavoured to comfort and in some sort to congratulate her, nevertheless, harped constantly on the fact that she was marrying a man without rank and without a fortune. Her congratulations were apologetic, and her comfortings took the guise of consolation. "Of course you won't be rich, my dear; but I really think you 'll do very well. Mr. Crosbie may be received anywhere, and you never need be ashamed of him." By which the countess implied that her elder married daughter was occasionally called on to be ashamed of her husband. "I wish he could keep a carriage for you, but perhaps that will come some day." Upon the whole Alexandrina did not repent, and stoutly told her father that she did know her own mind.

During all this time Lily Dale was as yet perfect in her happiness. That delay of a day or two in the receipt of the expected letter from her lover had not disquieted her. She had promised him that she would not distrust him, and she was firmly minded to keep her promises. Indeed no idea of breaking it came to her at this time. She was disappointed when the postman would come and bring no letter for her,—disappointed, as is the husbandman when the longed-for rain does not come to refresh the parched earth; but she was in no degree angry. "He will explain it," she said to herself. And she assured Bell that men never recognised the hunger and thirst after letters which women feel when away from those whom they love.

Then they heard at the Small House that the squire had gone away from Allington. During the last few days Bernard had not been much with them, and now they heard the news, not through their cousin, but from Hopkins. "I really can't undertake to say, Miss Bell, where the master 's gone to. It 's not likely the master 'd tell me where he was going to; not unless it was about seeds, or the likes of that."

"He has gone very suddenly," said Bell.

"Well, miss, I 've nothing to say to that. And why should n't he go sudden if he likes? I only know he had his gig, and went to the station. If you was to bury me alive I could n't tell you more."

"I should like to try," said Lily as they walked away. "He is such a cross old thing. I wonder whether Bernard has gone with my uncle." And then they thought no more about it.

On the day after that Bernard came down to the Small House, but he said nothing by way of account-

ing for the squire's absence. "He is in London, I know," said Bernard.

"I hope he 'll call on Mr. Crosbie," said Lily. But on this subject Bernard said not a word. He did ask Lily whether she had heard from Adolphus, in answer to which she replied, with as indifferent a voice as she could assume, that she had not had a letter that morning.

"I shall be angry with him if he 's not a good correspondent," said Mrs. Dale, when she and Lily were alone together.

"No, mamma, you must n't be angry with him. I won't let you be angry with him. Please to remember he 's my lover and not yours."

"But I can see you when you watch for the postman."

"I won't watch for the postman any more if it makes you have bad thoughts about him. Yes, they are bad thoughts. I won't have you think that he does n't do everything that is right."

On the next morning the postman brought a letter, or rather a note, and Lily at once saw that it was from Crosbie. She had contrived to intercept it near the back door, at which the postman called, so that her mother should not watch her watchings, nor see her disappointment if none should come. "Thank you, Jane," she said, very calmly, when the eager, kindly girl ran to her with the little missive; and she walked off to some solitude, trying to hide her impatience. The note had seemed so small that it amazed her; but when she opened it the contents amazed her more. There was neither beginning nor end. There was no appellation of love, and no signature. It contained

but two lines. "I will write to you at length to-morrow. This is my first day in London, and I have been so driven about that I cannot write." That was all, and it was scrawled on half a sheet of note-paper. Why, at any rate, had he not called her his dearest Lily? Why had he not assured her that he was ever her own? Such expressions, meaning so much, may be conveyed in a glance of the pen. "Ah," she said, "if he knew how I hunger and thirst after his love!"

She had but a moment left to her before she must join her mother and sister, and she used that moment in remembering her promise. "I know it is all right," she said to herself. "He does not think of these things as I do. He had to write at the last moment,—as he was leaving his office." And then, with a quiet, smiling face, she walked into the breakfast-parlour.

"What does he say, Lily?" asked Bell.

"What would you give to know?" said Lily.

"I would n't give twopence for the whole of it," said Bell.

"When you get anybody to write to you letters, I wonder whether you 'll show them to everybody?"

"But if there 's any special London news, I suppose we might hear it," said Mrs. Dale.

"But suppose there 's no special London news, mamma. The poor man had only been in town one day, you know: and there never is any news at this time of the year."

"Had he seen uncle Christopher?"

"I don't think he had; but he does n't say. We shall get all the news from him when he comes. He cares much more about London news than Adolphus does." And then there was no more said about the letter.

But Lily had read her two former letters over and over again at the breakfast-table; and though she had not read them aloud, she had repeated many words out of them, and had so annotated upon them that her mother, who had heard her, could have almost rewritten them. Now, she did not even show the paper; and then her absence, during which she had read the letter, had hardly exceeded a minute or two. All this Mrs. Dale observed, and she knew that her daughter had been again disappointed.

In fact that day Lily was very serious, but she did not appear to be unhappy. Early after breakfast Bell went over to the parsonage, and Mrs. Dale and her youngest daughter sat together over their work. "Mamma," she said, "I hope you and I are not to be divided when I go to live in London."

"We shall never be divided in heart, my love."

"Ah, but that will not be enough for happiness, though perhaps enough to prevent absolute unhappiness! I shall want to see you, touch you, and pet you as I do now." And she came and knelt on the cushion at her mother's feet.

"You will have some one else to caress and pet,—perhaps many others."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to throw me off, mamma?"

"God forbid, my darling. It is not mothers that throw off their children. What shall I have left when you and Bell are gone from me?"

"But we will never be gone. That 's what I mean. We are to be just the same to you always, even though we are married. I must have my right to be here as much as I have it now; and, in return, you shall have

your right to be there. His house must be a home to you,—not a cold place which you may visit now and again, with your best clothes on. You know what I mean, when I say that we must not be divided."

"But Lily——"

"Well, mamma?"

"I have no doubt we shall be happy together,—you and I."

"But you were going to say more than that."

"Only this,—that your house will be his house, and will be full without me. A daughter's marriage is always a painful parting."

"Is it, mamma?"

"Not that I would have it otherwise than it is. Do not think that I would wish to keep you at home with me. Of course you will both marry and leave me. I hope that he to whom you are going to devote yourself may be spared to love you and protect you." Then the widow's heart became too full, and she put away her child from her that she might hide her face.

"Mamma, mamma, I wish I was not going from you."

"No, Lily; do not say that. I should not be contented with life if I did not see both my girls married. I think that it is the only lot which can give to a woman perfect content and satisfaction. I would have you both married. I should be the most selfish being alive if I wished otherwise."

"Bell will settle herself near you, and then you will see more of her and love her better than you do me."

"I shall not love her better."

"I wish she would marry some London man, and then you would come with us, and be near to us. Do

you know, mamma, I sometimes think you don't like this place here."

"Your uncle has been very kind to give it to us."

"I know he has; and we have been very happy here. But if Bell should leave you——"

"Then should I go also. Your uncle has been very kind, but I sometimes feel that his kindness is a burden which I should not be strong enough to bear solely on my own shoulders. And what should keep me here, then?" Mrs. Dale as she said this felt that the "here" of which she spoke extended beyond the limits of the home which she held through the charity of her brother-in-law. Might not all the world, as far as she was concerned in it, be contained in that "here?" How was she to live if both her children should be taken away from her? She had already realised the fact that Crosbie's house could never be a home to her,—never even a temporary home. Her visits there must be of that full-dressed nature to which Lily had alluded. It was impossible that she could explain this to Lily. She would not prophesy that the hero of her girl's heart would be inhospitable to his wife's mother; but such had been her reading of Crosbie's character. Alas, alas, as matters were to go, his hospitality or inhospitality would be matter of small moment to them!

Again in the afternoon the two sisters were together, and Lily was still more serious than her wont. It might almost have been gathered from her manner that this marriage of hers was about to take place at once, and that she was preparing to leave her home. "Bell," she said, "I wonder why Dr. Crofts never comes to see us now?"

"It is n't a month since he was here, at our party."

"A month! But there was a time when he made some pretext for being here every other day."

"Yes, when mamma was ill."

"Ay, and since mamma was well, too. But I suppose I must not break the promise you made me give you. He 's not to be talked about even yet, is he?"

"I did.n't say he was not to be talked about. You know what I meant, Lily; and what I meant then, I mean now."

"And how long will it be before you mean something else? I do hope it will come some day,—I do indeed."

"It never will, Lily. I once fancied that I cared for Dr. Crofts, but it was only fancy. I know it, because——" She was going to explain that her knowledge on that point was assured to her, because since that day she had felt that she might have learned to love another man. But that other man had been Mr. Crosbie, and so she stopped herself.

"I wish he would come and ask you himself."

"He will never do so. He would never ask such a question without encouragement, and I shall give him none. Nor will he ever think of marrying till he can do so without,—without what he thinks to be imprudence as regards money. He has courage enough to be poor himself without unhappiness, but he has not courage to endure poverty with a wife. I know well what his feelings are."

"Well, we shall see," said Lily. "I should n't wonder if you were married first now, Bell. For my part I 'm quite prepared to wait for three years."

Late on that evening the squire returned to Allington, Bernard having driven over to meet him at the

station. He had telegraphed to his nephew that he would be back by a late train, and no more than this had been heard from him since he went. On that day Bernard had seen none of the ladies at the Small House. With Bell at the present moment it was impossible that he should be on easy terms. He could not meet her alone without recurring to the one special subject of interest between them, and as to that he did not choose to speak without much forethought. He had not known himself, when he had gone about his wooing so lightly, thinking it a slight thing, whether or no he might be accepted. Now it was no longer a slight thing to him. I do not know that it was love that made him so eager; not good, honest, downright love. But he had set his heart upon the object, and with the wilfulness of a Dale was determined that it should be his. He had no remotest idea of giving up his cousin, but he had at last persuaded himself that she was not to be won without some toil, and perhaps also some delay.

Nor had he been in a humour to talk either to Mrs. Dale or to Lily. He feared that Lady Julia's news was true,—that there might be in it something of truth; and while thus in doubt he could not go down to the Small House. So he hung about the place by himself, with a cigar in his mouth, fearing that something evil was going to happen, and when the message came for him, almost shuddered as he seated himself in the gig. What would it become him to do in this emergency if Crosbie had truly been guilty of the villainy with which Lady Julia had charged him? Thirty years ago he would have called the man out, and shot at him till one of them was hit. Now-a-days it was hardly possi-

ble for a man to do that; and yet what would the world say of him if he allowed such an injury as this to pass without vengeance?

His uncle, as he came forth from the station with his travelling-bag in his hand, was stern, gloomy, and silent. He came out and took his place in the gig almost without speaking. There were strangers about, and therefore his nephew at first could ask no question, but as the gig turned the corner out of the station-house yard he demanded the news.

"What have you heard?" he said.

But even then the squire did not answer at once. He shook his head, and turned away his face, as though he did not choose to be interrogated.

"Have you seen him, sir?" asked Bernard.

"No, he has not dared to see me."

"Then it is true?"

"True?—yes, it is all true. Why did you bring the scoundrel here? It has been your fault."

"No, sir; I must contradict that. I did not know him for a scoundrel."

"But it was your duty to have known him before you brought him here among them. Poor girl! how is she to be told?"

"Then she does not know it?"

"I fear not. Have you seen them?"

"I saw them yesterday, and she did not know it then; she may have heard it to-day."

"I don't think so. I believe he has been too great a coward to write to her. A coward indeed! How can any man find the courage to write such a letter as that?"

By degrees the squire told his tale. How he had

gone to Lady Julia, had made his way to London, had tracked Crosbie to his club, and had there learned the whole truth from Crosbie's friend, Fowler Pratt, we already know. "The coward escaped me while I was talking to the man he sent down," said the squire. "It was a concerted plan, and I think he was right. I should have brained him in the hall of the club." On the following morning Pratt had called upon him at his inn with Crosbie's apology. "His apology!" said the squire. "I have it in my pocket. Poor reptile; wretched worm of a man! I cannot understand it. On my honour, Bernard, I do not understand it. I think men are changed since I knew much of them. It would have been impossible for me to write such a letter as that." He went on telling how Pratt had brought him this letter, and had stated that Crosbie declined an interview. "The gentleman had the goodness to assure me that no good could come from such a meeting. 'You mean,' I answered, 'that I cannot touch pitch and not be defiled!' He acknowledged that the man was pitch. Indeed, he could not say a word for his friend."

"I know Pratt. He is a gentleman. I am sure he would not excuse him."

"Excuse him! How could any one excuse him? Words could not be found to excuse him." And then he sat silent for some half mile. "On my honour, Bernard, I can hardly yet bring myself to believe it. It is so new to me. It makes me feel that the world is changed, and that it is no longer worth a man's while to live in it."

"And he is engaged to this other girl?"

"Oh, yes; with the full consent of the family. It

is all arranged, and the settlements, no doubt, in the lawyer's hands by this time. He must have gone away from here determined to throw her over. Indeed, I don't suppose he ever meant to marry her. He was just passing away his time here in the country."

"He meant it up to the time of his leaving."

"I don't think it. Had he found me able and willing to give her a fortune, he might, perhaps, have married her. But I don't think he meant it for a moment after I told him that she would have nothing. Well, here we are. I may truly say that I never before came back to my own house with so sore a heart."

They sat silently over their supper, the squire showing more open sorrow than might have been expected from his character. "What am I to say to them in the morning?" he repeated over and over again. "How am I to do it? And if I tell the mother, how is she to tell her child?"

"Do you think that he has given no intimation of his purpose?"

"As far as I can tell, none. That man Pratt knew that he had not done so yesterday afternoon. I asked him what were the intentions of his blackguard friend, and he said that he did not know—that Crosbie would probably have written to me. Then he brought me this letter. There it is," and the squire threw the letter over the table; "read it and let me have it back. He thinks probably that the trouble is now over as far as he is concerned."

It was a vile letter to have written—not because the language was bad, or the mode of expression unfeeling, or the facts falsely stated—but because the thing to be told was in itself so vile. There are deeds which

will not bear a gloss—sins as to which the perpetrator cannot speak otherwise than as a reptile; circumstances which change a man and put upon him the worthlessness of vermin. Crosbie had struggled hard to write it, going home to do it after his last interview on that night with Pratt. But he had sat moodily in his chair at his lodgings, unable to take the pen in hand. Pratt was to come to him at his office on the following morning, and he went to bed resolving that he would write it at his desk. On the next day Pratt was there before a word of it had been written.

"I can't stand this kind of thing," said Pratt. "If you mean me to take it, you must write it at once." Then, with inward groaning, Crosbie sat himself at his table, and the words at last were forthcoming. Such words as they were! "I know that I can have no excuse to make to you—or to her. But, circumstanced as I now am, the truth is the best. I feel that I should not make Miss Dale happy; and, therefore, as an honest man, I think I best do my duty by relinquishing the honour which she and you had proposed for me." There was more of it, but we all know of what words such letters are composed, and how men write when they feel themselves constrained to write as reptiles.

"As an honest man!" repeated the squire. "On my honour, Bernard, as a gentleman, I do not understand it. I cannot believe it possible that the man who wrote that letter was sitting the other day as a guest at my table."

"What are we to do to him?" said Bernard, after a while.

"Treat him as you would a rat. Throw your stick

at him, if he comes under your feet; but beware, above all things, that he does not get into your house. That is too late for us now."

"There must be more than that, uncle."

"I don't know what more. There are deeds for committing which a man is doubly damned, because he has screened himself from overt punishment by the nature of his own villainy. We have to remember Lily's name, and do what may best tend to her comfort. Poor girl! poor girl!"

Then they were silent, till the squire rose and took his bed candle. "Bernard," he said, "let my sister-in-law know early to-morrow that I will see her here, if she will be good enough to come to me after breakfast. Do not have anything else said at the Small House. It may be that he has written to-day."

Then the squire went to bed, and Bernard sat over the dining-room fire, meditating on it all. How would the world expect that he should behave to Crosbie? and what should he do when he met Crosbie at the club?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOARD.

Crosbie, as we already know, went to his office in Whitehall on the morning after his escape from Sebright's, at which establishment he left the Squire of Allington in conference with Fowler Pratt. He had seen Fowler Pratt again that same night, and the course of the story will have shown what took place at that interview.

He went early to his office, knowing that he had before him the work of writing two letters, neither of which would run very glibly from his pen. One was to be his missive to the squire, to be delivered by his friend; the other, that fatal epistle to poor Lily, which, as the day passed away, he found himself utterly unable to accomplish. The letter to the squire he did write, under certain threats; and, as we have seen, was considered to have degraded himself to the vermin rank of humanity by the meanness of his production.

But on reaching his office he found that other cares awaited him,—cares which he would have taken much delight in bearing, had the state of his mind enabled him to take delight in anything. On entering the lobby of his office, at ten o'clock, he became aware that he was received by the messengers assembled there with almost more than their usual deference. He was al-

ways a great man at the General Committee Office; but there are shades of greatness and shades of difference, which, though quite beyond the powers of definition, nevertheless manifest themselves clearly to the experienced ear and eye. He walked through to his own apartment, and there found two official letters addressed to him lying on his table. The first which came to hand, though official, was small, and marked private, and it was addressed in the handwriting of his old friend, Butterwell, the outgoing secretary. "I shall see you in the morning, nearly as soon as you get this," said the semi-official note; "but I must be the first to congratulate you on the acquisition of my old shoes. They will be very easy in the wearing to you, though they pinched my corns a little at first. I dare say they want new soling, and perhaps they are a little down at heels; but you will find some excellent cobbler to make them all right, and will give them a grace in the wearing which they have sadly lacked since they came into my possession. I wish you much joy with them," &c., &c. He then opened the larger official letter, but that had now but little interest for him. He could have made a copy of the contents without seeing them. The Board of Commissioners had had great pleasure in promoting him to the office of secretary, vacated by the promotion of Mr. Butterwell to a seat at their own Board; and then the letter was signed by Mr. Butterwell himself.

How delightful to him would have been this welcome on his return to his office had his heart in other respects been free from care! And as he thought of this, he remembered all Lily's charms. He told himself how much she excelled the noble scion of the De

Courcy stock, with whom he was now destined to mate himself; how the bride he had rejected excelled the one he had chosen in grace, beauty, faith, freshness, and all feminine virtues. If he could only wipe out the last fortnight from the facts of his existence! But fortnights such as those are not to be wiped out,—not even with many sorrowful years of tedious scrubbing.

And at this moment it seemed to him as though all those impediments which had frightened him when he had thought of marrying Lily Dale were withdrawn. That which would have been terrible with seven or eight hundred a year, would have been made delightful with twelve or thirteen. Why had his fate been so unkind to him? Why had not this promotion come to him but one fortnight earlier? Why had it not been declared before he had made his visit to that terrible castle? He even said to himself that if he had positively known the fact before Pratt had seen Mr. Dale, he would have sent a different message to the squire, and would have braved the anger of all the race of the De Courcys. But in that he lied to himself, and he knew that he did so. An earl, in his imagination, was hedged by so strong a divinity, that his treason towards Alexandrina could do no more than peep at what it would. It had been considered but little by him, when the project first offered itself to his mind, to jilt the niece of a small rural squire; but it was not in him to jilt the daughter of a countess.

That house full of babies in St. John's Wood appeared to him now under a very different guise from that which it wore as he sat in his room at Courcy Castle on the evening of his arrival there. Then such

an establishment had to him the flavour of a graveyard. It was as though he were going to bury himself alive. Now that it was out of his reach, he thought of it as a paradise upon earth. And then he considered what sort of a paradise Lady Alexandrina would make for him. It was astonishing how ugly was the Lady Alexandrina, how old, how graceless, how destitute of all pleasant charm, seen through the spectacles which he wore at the present moment.

During his first hour at the office he did nothing. One or two of the younger clerks came in and congratulated him with much heartiness. He was popular at his office, and they had got a step by his promotion. Then he met one or two of the elder clerks, and was congratulated with much less heartiness. "I suppose it 's all right," said one bluff old gentleman. "My time is gone by, I know. I married too early to be able to wear a good coat when I was young, and I never was acquainted with any lords or lords' families." The sting of this was the sharper because Crosbie had begun to feel how absolutely useless to him had been all that high interest and noble connection which he had formed. He had really been promoted because he knew more about his work than any of the other men, and Lady De Courcy's influential relation at the India Board had not yet even had time to write a note upon the subject.

At eleven Mr. Butterwell came into Crosbie's room, and the new secretary was forced to clothe himself in smiles. Mr. Butterwell was a pleasant, handsome man of about fifty, who had never yet set the Thames on fire, and had never attempted to do so. He was perhaps a little more civil to great men and a little more

patronising to those below him than he would have been had he been perfect. But there was something frank and English even in his mode of bowing before the mighty ones, and to those who were not mighty he was rather too civil than either stern or supercilious. He knew that he was not very clever, but he knew also how to use those who were clever. He seldom made any mistake, and was very scrupulous not to tread on men's corns. Though he had no enemies, yet he had a friend or two; and we may therefore say of Mr. Butterwell that he had walked his path in life discreetly. At the age of thirty-five he had married a lady with some little fortune, and now he lived a pleasant, easy, smiling life in a villa at Putney. When Mr. Butterwell heard, as he often did hear, of the difficulty which an English gentleman has of earning his bread in his own country, he was wont to look back on his own career with some complacency. He knew that he had not given the world much; yet he had received largely, and no one had begrudged it to him. "Tact," Mr. Butterwell used to say to himself, as he walked along the paths of his Putney villa. "Tact. Tact. Tact."

"Crosbie," he said, as he entered the room cheerily, "I congratulate you with all my heart. I do, indeed. You have got the step early in life, and you deserve it thoroughly;—much better than I did when I was appointed to the same office."

"Oh, no," said Crosbie, gloomily.

"But I say, oh, yes. We are deuced lucky to have such a man, and so I told the commissioners."

"I 'm sure I 'm very much obliged to you."

"I 've known it all along,—before you left even. Sir Raffle Buffle had told me he was to go to the In-

come-tax Office. The chair is two thousand there, you know; and I had been promised the first seat at the Board."

"Ah;—I wish I 'd known," said Crosbie.

"You are much better as you are," said Butterwell. "There 's no pleasure like a surprise! Besides, one knows a thing of that kind, and yet does n't know it. I don't mind saying now that I knew it,—swearing that I knew it,—but I would n't have said so to a living being the day before yesterday. There are such slips between the cups and the lips. Suppose Sir Raffle had not gone to the Income-tax!"

"Exactly so," said Crosbie.

"But it 's all right now. Indeed I sat at the Board yesterday, though I signed the letter afterwards. I 'm not sure that I don't lose more than I gain."

"What! with three hundred a year more and less work?"

"Ah, but look at the interest of the thing! The secretary sees everything and knows everything. But I 'm getting old, and, as you say, the lighter work will suit me. By-the-bye, will you come down to Putney to-morrow? Mrs. Butterwell will be delighted to see the new secretary. There 's nobody in town now, so you can have no ground for refusing."

But Mr. Crosbie did find some ground for refusing. It would have been impossible for him to have sat and smiled at Mrs. Butterwell's table in his present frame of mind. In a mysterious, half-explanatory manner, he let Mr. Butterwell know that private affairs of importance made it absolutely necessary that he should remain that evening in town. "And indeed," as he said, "he was not his own master just at present."

"By-the-bye,—of course not. I had quite forgotten to congratulate you on that head. So you 're going to be married? Well; I 'm very glad, and hope you 'll be as lucky as I have been."

"Thank you," said Crosbie, again rather gloomily.

"A young lady from near Guestwick, is n't it; or somewhere in those parts?"

"N——no," stammered Crosbie. "The lady comes from Barsetshire."

"Why, I heard the name. Is n't she a Bell, or Tait, or Ball, or some such name as that?"

"No," said Crosbie, assuming what boldness he could command. "Her name is De Courcy."

"One of the earl's daughters?"

"Yes," said Crosbie.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I 'd heard wrong. You 're going to be allied to a very noble family, and I am heartily glad to hear of your success in life." Then Butterwell shook him very cordially by the hand,—having offered him no such special testimony of approval when under the belief that he was going to marry a Bell, a Tait, or a Ball. All the same, Mr. Butterwell began to think that there was something wrong. He had heard from an indubitable source that Crosbie had engaged himself to a niece of a squire with whom he had been staying near Guestwick,—a girl without any money; and Mr. Butterwell, in his wisdom, had thought his friend Crosbie to be rather a fool for his pains. But now he was going to marry one of the De Courcys! Mr. Butterwell was rather at his wits' ends.

"Well; we shall be sitting at two, you know, and of course you 'll come to us. If you 're at leisure be-

fore that I 'll make over what papers I have to you. I 've not been a Lord Eldon in my office, and they won't break your back."

Immediately after that Fowler Pratt had been shown into Crosbie's room, and Crosbie had written the letter to the squire under Pratt's eye.

He could take no joy in his promotion. When Pratt left him he tried to lighten his heart. He endeavoured to throw Lily and her wrongs behind him, and fix his thoughts on his advancing successes in life; but he could not do it. A self-imposed trouble will not allow itself to be banished. If a man lose a thousand pounds by a friend's fault, or by a turn in the wheel of fortune, he can, if he be a man, put his grief down and trample it under foot; he can exorcise the spirit of his grievance, and bid the evil one depart from out of his house. But such exorcism is not to be used when the sorrow has come from a man's own folly and sin;—especially not if it has come from his own selfishness. Such are the cases which make men drink; which drive them on to the avoidance of all thought; which create gamblers and reckless prodigals; which are the promoters of suicide. How could he avoid writing this letter to Lily? He might blow his brains out, and so let there be an end of it all. It was to such reflections that he came, when he sat himself down endeavouring to reap satisfaction from his promotion.

But Crosbie was not a man to commit suicide. In giving him his due I must protest that he was too good for that. He knew too well that a pistol-bullet could not be the be-all and the end-all here, and there was too much manliness in him for so cowardly an escape. The burden must be borne. But how was he

to bear it? There he sat till it was two o'clock, neglecting Mr. Butterwell and his office papers, and not stirring from his seat till a messenger summoned him before the Board. The Board, as he entered the room, was not such a Board as the public may, perhaps, imagine such Boards to be. There was a round table, with a few pens lying about, and a comfortable leathern arm-chair at the side of it, farthest from the door. Sir Raffle Buffle was leaving his late colleagues, and was standing with his back to the fireplace, talking very loudly. Sir Raffle was a great bully, and the Board was uncommonly glad to be rid of him; but as this was to be his last appearance at the Committee Office, they submitted to his voice meekly. Mr. Butterwell was standing close to him, essaying to laugh mildly at Sir Raffle's jokes. A little man, hardly more than five feet high, with small but honest-looking eyes, and close-cut hair, was standing behind the arm-chair, rubbing his hands together, and longing for the departure of Sir Raffle, in order that he might sit down. This was Mr. Optimist, the new chairman, in praise of whose appointment the Daily Jupiter had been so loud, declaring that the present minister was showing himself superior to all ministers who had ever gone before him, in giving promotion solely on the score of merit. The Daily Jupiter, a fortnight since, had published a very eloquent article, strongly advocating the claims of Mr. Optimist, and was naturally pleased to find that its advice had been taken. Has not an obedient minister a right to the praise of those powers which he obeys?

Mr. Optimist was, in truth, an industrious little gentleman, very well connected, who had served the pub-

lic all his life, and who was, at any rate, honest in his dealings. Nor was he a bully, such as his predecessor. It might, however, be a question whether he carried guns enough for the command in which he was now to be employed. There was but one other member of the Board, Major Fiasco by name, a discontented, broken-hearted, silent man, who had been sent to the General Committee Office some few years before because he was not wanted anywhere else. He was a man who had intended to do great things when he entered public life, and had possessed the talent and energy for things moderately great. He had also possessed to a certain extent the ear of those high in office; but, in some way, matters had not gone well with him, and in running his course he had gone on the wrong side of the post. He was still in the prime of life, and yet all men knew that Major Fiasco had nothing further to expect from the public or from the government. Indeed, there were not wanting those who said that Major Fiasco was already in receipt of a liberal income, for which he gave no work in return; that he merely filled a chair for four hours a day four or five days a week, signing his name to certain forms and documents, reading, or pretending to read, certain papers, but, in truth, doing no good; Major Fiasco, on the other hand, considered himself to be a deeply injured individual, and he spent his life in brooding over his wrongs. He believed now in nothing and in nobody. He had begun public life striving to be honest, and he now regarded all around him as dishonest. He had no satisfaction in any man other than that which he found when some event would show to him that this or that other compeer of his own had

proved himself to be self-interested, false, or fraudulent. "Don't tell me, Butterwell," he would say—for with Mr. Butterwell he maintained some semi-official intimacy, and he would take that gentleman by the buttonhole, holding him close. "Don't tell me. I know what men are. I 've seen the world. I 've been looking at things with my eyes open. I knew what he was doing." And then he would tell of the sly deed of some official known well to them both, not denouncing it by any means, but affecting to take it for granted that the man in question was a rogue. Butterwell would shrug his shoulders, and laugh gently, and say that, upon his word, he did n't think the world so bad as Fiasco made it out to be.

Nor did he; for Butterwell believed in many things. He believed in his Putney villa on this earth, and he believed also that he might achieve some sort of Putney villa in the world beyond without undergoing present martyrdom. His Putney villa first, with all its attendant comforts, and then his duty to the public afterwards. It was thus that Mr. Butterwell regulated his conduct; and as he was solicitous that the villa should be as comfortable a home to his wife as to himself, and that it should be specially comfortable to his friends, I do not think that we need quarrel with his creed.

Mr. Optimist believed in everything, but especially he believed in the prime minister, in the Daily Jupiter, in the General Committee Office, and in himself. He had long thought that everything was nearly right; but now that he himself was chairman at the General Committee Office, he was quite sure that everything must be right. In Sir Raffle Buffle, indeed, he had

never believed; and now it was, perhaps, the greatest joy of his life that he should never again be called upon to hear the tones of that terrible knight's hated voice.

Seeing who were the components of the new Board, it may be presumed that Crosbie would look forward to enjoying a not uninfluential position in his office. There were, indeed, some among the clerks who did not hesitate to say that the new secretary would have it pretty nearly all his own way. As for "Old Opt," there would be, they said, no difficulty about him. Only tell him that such and such a decision was his own, and he would be sure to believe the teller. Butterwell was not fond of work, and had been accustomed to lean upon Crosbie for many years. As for Fiasco, he would be cynical in words, but wholly indifferent in deed. If the whole office were made to go to the mischief, Fiasco, in his own grim way, would enjoy the confusion.

"Wish you joy, Crosbie," said Sir Raffle, standing up on the rug, waiting for the new secretary to go up to him and shake hands. But Sir Raffle was going, and the new secretary did not indulge him.

"Thank ye, Sir Raffle," said Crosbie, without going near the rug.

"Mr. Crosbie, I congratulate you most sincerely," said Mr. Optimist. "Your promotion has been the result altogether of your own merit. You have been selected for the high office which you are now called upon to fill solely because it has been thought that you are the most fit man to perform the onerous duties attached to it. Hum—h-m—ha. As regards my share in the recommendation which we found ourselves

bound to submit to the Treasury, I must say that I never felt less hesitation in my life, and I believe I may declare as much as regards the other members of the Board." And Mr. Optimist looked around him for approving words. He had come forward from his standing ground behind his chair to welcome Crosbie, and had shaken his hand cordially. Fiasco also had risen from his seat, and had assured Crosbie in a whisper that he had feathered his nest uncommon well. Then he had sat down again.

"Indeed you may, as far as I am concerned," said Butterwell.

"I told the Chancellor of the Exchequer," said Sir Raffle, speaking very loud and with much authority, "that unless he had some first-rate man to send from elsewhere I could name a fitting candidate. 'Sir Raffle,' he said, 'I mean to keep it in the office, and therefore shall be glad of your opinion.' 'In that case, Mr. Chancellor,' said I, 'Mr. Crosbie must be the man.' 'Mr. Crosbie shall be the man,' said the Chancellor. And Mr. Crosbie is the man."

"Your friend Sark spoke to Lord Brock about it," said Fiasco. Now the Earl of Sark was a young nobleman of much influence at the present moment, and Lord Brock was the prime minister. "You should thank Lord Sark."

"Had as much to do with it as if my footman had spoken," said Sir Raffle.

"I am very much obliged to the Board for their good opinion," said Crosbie, gravely. "I am obliged to Lord Sark as well,—and also to your footman, Sir Raffle, if, as you seem to say, he has interested himself in my favour."

"I did n't say anything of the kind," said Sir Raffle. "I thought it right to make you understand that it was my opinion, given, of course, officially, which prevailed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Well, gentlemen, as I shall be wanted in the city, I will say good morning to you. Is my carriage ready, Boggs?" Upon which the attendant messenger opened the door, and the great Sir Raffle Buffle took his final departure from the scene of his former labours.

"As to the duties of your new office"—and Mr. Optimist continued his speech, taking no other notice of the departure of his enemy than what was indicated by an increased brightness of his eye and a more satisfactory tone of voice—"you will find yourself quite familiar with them."

"Indeed he will," said Butterwell.

"And I am quite sure that you will perform them with equal credit to yourself, satisfaction to the department, and advantage to the public. We shall always be glad to have your opinion on any subject of importance that may come before us; and as regards the internal discipline of the office, we feel that we may leave it safely in your hands. In any matter of importance you will, of course, consult us, and I feel very confident that we shall go on together with great comfort and with mutual confidence." Then Mr. Optimist looked at his brother commissioners, sat down in his arm-chair, and taking in his hands some papers before him, began the routine business of the day.

It was nearly five o'clock when, on this special occasion, the secretary returned from the board-room to his own office. Not for a moment had the weight been off his shoulders while Sir Raffle had been brag-

ging or Mr. Optimist making his speech. He had been thinking, not of them, but of Lily Dale; and though they had not discovered his thoughts, they had perceived that he was hardly like himself.

"I never saw a man so little elated by good fortune in my life," said Mr. Optimist.

"Ah, he 's got something on his mind!" said Butterwell. "He 's going to be married, I believe."

"If that 's the case, it 's no wonder he should n't be elated," said Major Fiasco, who was himself a bachelor.

When in his own room again, Crosbie at once seized on a sheet of note-paper, as though by hurrying himself on with it he could get that letter to Allington written. But though the paper was before him, and the pen in his hand, the letter did not, would not, get itself written. With what words was he to begin it? To whom should it be written? How was he to declare himself the villain which he had made himself? The letters from his office were taken away every night shortly after six, and at six o'clock he had not written a word. "I will do it at home to-night," he said to himself, and then, tearing off a scrap of paper, he scratched those few lines which Lily received, and which she had declined to communicate to her mother or sister. Crosbie, as he wrote them, conceived that they would in some way prepare the poor girl for the coming blow,—that they would make her know that all was not right; but in so supposing he had not counted on the constancy of her nature, nor had he thought of the promise which she had given him that nothing should make her doubt him. He wrote the scrap, and then taking his hat walked off through the

gloom of the November evening up Charing Cross and St. Martin's Lane, towards the Seven Dials and Bloomsbury into regions of the town with which he had no business, and which he never frequented. He hardly knew where he went or wherefore. How was he to escape from the weight of the burden which was now crushing him? It seemed to him as though he would change his position with thankfulness for that of the junior clerk in his office, if only that junior clerk had upon his mind no such betrayal of trust as that of which he was guilty.

At half-past seven he found himself at Sebright's, and there he dined. A man will dine, even though his heart be breaking. Then he got into a cab, and had himself taken home to Mount Street. During his walk he had sworn to himself that he would not go to bed that night till the letter was written and posted. It was twelve before the first words were marked on the paper, and yet he kept his oath. Between two and three, in the cold moonlight, he crawled out and deposited his letter in the nearest post-office.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN EAMES RETURNS TO BURTON CRESCENT.

JOHN EAMES and Crosbie returned to town on the same day. It will be remembered how Eames had assisted Lord De Guest in the matter of the bull, and how great had been the earl's gratitude on the occasion. The memory of this, and the strong encouragement which he received from his mother and sister for having made such a friend by his gallantry, lent some slight satisfaction to his last hours at home. But his two misfortunes were too serious to allow of anything like real happiness. He was leaving Lily behind him, engaged to be married to a man whom he hated, and he was returning to Burton Crescent, where he would have to face Amelia Roper,—Amelia either in her rage or in her love. The prospect of Amelia in her rage was very terrible to him; but his greatest fear was of Amelia in her love. He had in his letter declined matrimony; but what if she talked down all his objections, and carried him off to church in spite of himself!

When he reached London and got into a cab with his portmanteau, he could hardly fetch up courage to bid the man drive him to Burton Crescent. "I might as well go to an hotel for the night," he said to himself, "and then I can learn how things are going on from Cradell at the office." Nevertheless, he did give

the direction to Burton Crescent, and when it was once given felt ashamed to change it. But, as he was driven up to the well-known door, his heart was so low within him that he might almost be said to have lost it. When the cabman demanded whether he should knock, he could not answer; and when the maid-servant at the door greeted him, he almost ran away.

"Who 's at home?" said he, asking the question in a very low voice.

"There 's missus," said the girl, "and Miss Spruce, and Mrs. Lupex. He 's away somewhere, in his tantrums again; and there 's Mr. ——"

"Is Miss Roper here," he said, still whispering.

"Oh, yes! Miss Mealyer 's here," said the girl, speaking in a cruelly loud voice. "She was in the dining-room just now, putting out the table. Miss Mealyer!" And the girl, as she called out the name, opened the dining-room door. Johnny Eames felt that his knees were too weak to support him.

But Miss Mealyer was not in the dining-room. She had perceived the advancing cab of her sworn adorer, and had thought it expedient to retreat from her domestic duties, and fortify herself among her brushes and ribbons. Had it been possible that she should know how very weak and cowardly was the enemy against whom she was called upon to put herself in action, she might probably have fought her battle somewhat differently, and have achieved a speedy victory, at the cost of an energetic shot or two. But she did not know. She thought it probable that she might obtain power over him and manage him; but it did not occur to her that his legs were so weak beneath him that she might almost blow him over with

a breath. None but the worst and most heartless of women know the extent of their own power over men; —as none but the worst and most heartless of men know the extent of their power over women. Amelia Roper was not a good specimen of the female sex, but there were worse women than she was.

"She ain't there, Mr. Eames; but you 'll see her in the drawen-room," said the girl. "And it 's she 'll be glad to see you back again, Mr. Eames." But he scrupulously passed the door of the upstairs sitting-room, not even looking within it, and contrived to get himself into his own chamber without having encountered anybody. "Here 's yer 'ot water, Mr. Eames," said the girl, coming up to him after an interval of half-an-hour; "and dinner 'll be on the table in ten minutes. Mr. Cradell is come in, and so is missus' son."

It was still open to him to go out and dine at some eating-house in the Strand. He could start out, leaving word that he was engaged, and so postpone the evil hour. He had almost made up his mind to do so, and certainly would have done it, had not the sitting-room door opened as he was on the landing-place. The door opened, and he found himself confronting the assembled company. First came Cradell, and leaning on his arm, I regret to say, was Mrs. Lupex, —*Egyptia conjux!* Then there came Miss Spruce with young Roper; Amelia and her mother brought up the rear together. There was no longer question of flight now; and poor Eames, before he knew what he was doing, was carried down into the dining-room with the rest of the company. They were all glad to see him, and welcomed him back warmly, but he was so much beside himself that he could not ascertain whether

Amelia's voice was joined with the others. He was already seated at table, and had before him a plate of soup, before he recognised the fact that he was sitting between Mrs. Roper and Mrs. Lupex. The latter lady had separated herself from Mr. Cradell as she entered the room. "Under all the circumstances perhaps it will be better for us to be apart," she said. "A lady can't make herself too safe; can she, Mrs. Roper? There 's no danger between you and me, is there, Mr. Eames,—specially when Miss Amelia is opposite?" The last words, however, were intended to be whispered into his ear.

But Johnny made no answer to her; contenting himself for the moment with wiping the perspiration from his brow. There was Amelia opposite to him, looking at him—the very Amelia to whom he had written, declining the honour of marrying her. Of what her mood towards him might be, he could form no judgment from her looks. Her face was simply stern and impassive, and she seemed inclined to eat her dinner in silence. A slight smile of derision had passed across her face as she heard Mrs. Lupex whisper, and it might have been discerned that her nose, at the same time, became somewhat elevated; but she said not a word.

"I hope you 've enjoyed yourself, Mr. Eames, among the vernal beauties of the country," said Mrs. Lupex.

"Very much, thank you," he replied.

"There 's nothing like the country at this autumnal season of the year. As for myself, I 've never been accustomed to remain in London after the breaking up of the *beau monde*. We 've usually been to Broadstairs, which is a very charming place, with most ele-

gant society, but now——" and she shook her head, by which all the company knew that she intended to allude to the sins of Mr. Lupex.

"I 'd never wish to sleep out of London for my part," said Mrs. Roper. "When a woman 's got a house over her head, I don't think her mind 's ever easy out of it."

She had not intended any reflection on Mrs. Lupex for not having a house of her own, but that lady immediately bristled up. "That 's just what the snails say, Mrs. Roper. And as for having a house of one's own, it 's a very good thing, no doubt, sometimes; but that 's according to circumstances. It has suited me lately to live in lodgings, but there 's no knowing whether I may n't fall lower than that yet, and have ——" but here she stopped herself, and looking over at Mr. Cradell nodded her head.

"And have to let them," said Mrs. Roper. "I hope you 'll be more lucky with your lodgers than I have been with some of mine. Jemima, hand the potatoes to Miss Spruce. Miss Spruce, do let me send you a little more gravy? There 's plenty here, really." Mrs. Roper was probably thinking of Mr. Todgers.

"I hope I shall," said Mrs. Lupex. "But, as I was saying, Broadstairs is delightful. Were you ever at Broadstairs, Mr. Cradell?"

"Never, Mrs. Lupex. I generally go abroad in my leave. One sees more of the world, you know. I was at Dieppe last June, and found that very delightful—though rather lonely. I shall go to Ostend this year; only December is so late for Ostend. It was a deuced shame my getting December, was n't it, Johnny?"

"Yes, it was," said Eames. "I managed better."

"And what have you been doing, Mr. Eames?" said Mrs. Lupex, with one of her sweetest smiles. "Whatever it may have been, you 've not been false to the cause of beauty, I 'm sure." And she looked over to Amelia with a knowing smile. But Amelia was engaged upon her plate, and went on with her dinner without turning her eyes either on Mrs. Lupex or on John Eames.

"I have n't done anything particular," said Eames. "I 've just been staying with my mother."

"We 've been very social here, have n't we, Miss Amelia?" continued Mrs. Lupex. "Only now and then a cloud comes across the heavens, and the lights at the banquet are darkened." Then she put her handkerchief up to her eyes, sobbing deeply, and they all knew that she was again alluding to the sins of her husband.

As soon as dinner was over the ladies with young Mr. Roper retired, and Eames and Cradell were left to take their wine over the dining-room fire,—or their glass of gin and water, as it might be. "Well, Caudle, old fellow," said one. "Well, Johnny, my boy," said the other. "What 's the news at the office?" said Eames.

"Muggeridge has been playing the very mischief." Muggeridge was the second clerk in Cradell's room. "We 're going to put him into Coventry and not speak to him except officially. But to tell you the truth, my hands have been so full here at home, that I have n't thought much about the office. What am I to do about that woman?"

"Do about her? How do about her?"

"Yes; what am I to do about her? How am I to

manage with her? There 's Lupex off again in one of his fits of jealousy."

"But it 's not your fault, I suppose?"

"Well, I can't just say. I am fond of her, and that 's the long and the short of it; deuced fond of her."

"But, my dear Caudle, you know she 's that man's wife."

"Oh, yes, I know all about it. I 'm not going to defend myself. It 's wrong, I know,—pleasant, but wrong. But what 's a fellow to do? I suppose in strict morality I ought to leave the lodgings. But, by George, I don't see why a man 's to be turned out in that way. And then I could n't make a clean score with old mother Roper. But I say, old fellow, who gave you the gold chain?"

"Well; it was an old family friend at Guestwick; or rather, I should say, a man who said he knew my father."

"And he gave you that because he knew your governor! Is there a watch to it?"

"Yes, there 's a watch. It was n't exactly that. There was some trouble about a bull. To tell the truth, it was Lord De Guest; the queerest fellow, Caudle, you ever met in your life; but such a trump. I 've got to go and dine with him at Christmas." And then the old story of the bull was told.

"I wish I could find a lord in a field with a bull," said Cradell. We may, however, be permitted to doubt whether Mr. Cradell would have earned a watch even if he had had his wish.

"You see," continued Cradell, reverting to the subject on which he most delighted to talk, "I 'm not responsible for that man's ill-conduct."

"Does anybody say you are?"

"No; nobody says so. But people seem to think so. When he is by I hardly speak to her. She is thoughtless and giddy, as women are, and takes my arm, and that kind of thing, you know. It makes him mad with rage, but upon my honour I don't think she means any harm."

"I don't suppose she does," said Eames.

"Well; she may or she may n't. I hope with all my heart she does n't."

"And where is he now?"

"This is between ourselves, you know; but she went to find him this afternoon. Unless he gives her money she can't stay here, nor, for the matter of that, will she be able to go away. If I mention something to you, you won't tell any one?"

"Of course I won't."

"I would n't have it known to any one for the world. I 've lent her seven pounds ten. It 's that which makes me so short with mother Roper."

"Then I think you 're a fool for your pains."

"Ah, that 's so like you. I always said you 'd no feeling of real romance. If I cared for a woman I 'd give her the coat off my back."

"I 'd do better than that," said Johnny. "I 'd give her the heart out of my body. I 'd be chopped up alive for a girl I loved; but it should n't be for another man's wife."

"That 's a matter of taste. But she 's been to Lupex to-day at that house he goes to in Drury Lane. She had a terrible scene there. He was going to commit suicide in the middle of the street, and she declares that it all comes from jealousy. Think what

a time I have of it—standing always, as one may say, on gunpowder. He may turn up here any moment, you know. But, upon my word, for the life of me I cannot desert her. If I were to turn my back on her she would n't have a friend in the world. And how 's L. D.? I 'll tell you what it is—you 'll have some trouble with the divine Amelia."

"Shall I?"

"By Jove, you will. But how 's L. D. all this time?"

"L. D. is engaged to be married to a man named Adolphus Crosbie," said poor Johnny, slowly. "If you please, we will not say any more about her."

"Whew—w—w! That 's what makes you so down in the mouth! L. D. going to marry Crosbie! Why, that 's the man who is to be the new secretary at the General Committee Office. Old Huffle Scuffle, who was their chair, has come to us, you know. There 's been a general move at the G. C., and this Crosbie has got to be secretary. He 's a lucky chap, is n't he?"

"I don't know anything about his luck. He 's one of those fellows that make me hate them the first time I look at them. I 've a sort of a feeling that I shall live to kick him some day."

"That 's the time, is it? Then I suppose Amelia will have it all her own way now."

"I 'll tell you what, Caudle. I 'd sooner get up through the trap-door, and throw myself off the roof into the area, than marry Amelia Roper."

"Have you and she had any conversation since you came back?"

"Not a word."

"Then I tell you fairly you 've got trouble before you. Amelia and Maria—Mrs. Lupex, I mean—are

as thick as thieves just at present, and they have been talking you over. Maria—that is, Mrs. Lupex—lets it all out to me. You 'll have to mind where you are, old fellow."

Eames was not inclined to discuss the matter any further, so he finished his toddy in silence. Cradell, however, who felt that there was something in his affairs of which he had reason to be proud, soon returned to the story of his own very extraordinary position. "By Jove, I don't know that a man was ever so circumstanced," he said. "She looks to me to protect her, and yet what can I do?"

At last Cradell got up, and declared that he must go to the ladies. "She 's so nervous, that unless she has some one to countenance her she becomes unwell."

Eames declared his purpose of going to the divan, or to the theatre, or to take a walk in the streets. The smiles of beauty had no longer charms for him in Burton Crescent.

"They 'll expect you to take a cup of tea the first night," said Cradell; but Eames declared that they might expect it.

"I 'm in no humour for it," said he. "I 'll tell you what, Cradell, I shall leave this place, and take rooms for myself somewhere. I 'll never go into a lodging-house again."

As he so spoke, he was standing at the dining-room door; but he was not allowed to escape in this easy way. Jemima, as he went out into the passage, was there with a three-cornered note in her hand. "From Miss Mealyer," she said. "Miss Mealyer is in the back parlour all by herself."

Poor Johnny took the note, and read it by the lamp over the front door.

"Are you not going to speak to me on the day of your return? It cannot be that you will leave the house without seeing me for a moment. I am in the back parlour."

When he had read these words, he paused in the passage, with his hat on. Jemima, who could not understand why any young man should hesitate as to seeing his lady-love in the back parlour alone, whispered to him again, in her audible way, "Miss Mealyer is there, sir; and all the rest on 'em 's upstairs!" So compelled, Eames put down his hat, and walked with slow steps into the back parlour.

How was it to be with the enemy? Was he to encounter Amelia in anger, or Amelia in love? She had seemed to be stern and defiant when he had ventured to steal a look at her across the dining-table, and now he expected that she would turn upon him with loud threatenings and protestations as to her wrongs. But it was not so. When he entered the room she was standing with her back to him, leaning on the mantel-piece, and at the first moment she did not essay to speak. He walked into the middle of the room and stood there, waiting for her to begin.

"Shut the door!" she said, looking over her shoulder. "I suppose you don't want the girl to hear all you 've got to say to me!"

Then he shut the door; but still Amelia stood with her back to him, leaning upon the mantel-piece.

It did not seem that he had much to say, for he remained perfectly silent.

"Well!" said Amelia, after a long pause, and she

then again looked over her shoulder. "Well, Mr. Eames!"

"Jemima gave me your note, and so I 've come," said he.

"And is this the way we meet!" she exclaimed, turning suddenly upon him, and throwing her long black hair back over her shoulders. There certainly was some beauty about her. Her eyes were large and bright, and her shoulders were well turned. She might have done as an artist's model for a Judith, but I doubt whether any man, looking well into her face, could think that she would do well as a wife. "Oh, John, is it to be thus, after love such as ours?" And she clasped her hands together, and stood before him.

"I don't know what you mean," said Eames.

"If you are engaged to marry L. D., tell me so at once. Be a man, and speak out, sir."

"No," said Eames; "I am not engaged to marry the lady to whom you allude."

"On your honour?"

"I won't have her spoken about. I 'm not going to marry her, and that 's enough."

"Do you think that I wish to speak of her? What can L. D. be to me as long as she is nothing to you? Oh, Johnny, why did you write me that heartless letter?" Then she leaned upon his shoulder—or attempted to do so.

I cannot say that Eames shook her off, seeing that he lacked the courage to do so; but he shuffled his shoulder about so that the support was uneasy to her, and she was driven to stand erect again. "Why did you write that cruel letter?" she said again.

"Because I thought it best, Amelia. What 's a man to do with ninety pounds a year, you know?"

"But your mother allows you twenty."

"And what' s a man to do with a hundred and ten?"

"Rising five pounds every year," said the well-informed Amelia. "Of course we should live here, with mamma, and you would just go on paying her as you do now. If your heart was right, Johnny, you would n't think so much about money. If you loved me—as you said you did——" Then a little sob came, and the words were stopped. The words were stopped, but she was again upon his shoulder. What was he to do? In truth, his only wish was to escape, and yet his arm, quite in opposition to his own desires, found its way round her waist. In such a combat a woman has so many points in her favour! "Oh, Johnny," she said again, as soon as she felt the pressure of his arm. "Gracious, what a beautiful watch you 've got," and she took the trinket out of his pocket. "Did you buy that?"

"No; it was given to me."

"John Eames, did L. D. give it you?"

"No, no, no," he shouted, stamping on the floor as he spoke.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Amelia, quelled for the moment by his energy. "Perhaps it was your mother."

"No; it was a man. Never mind about the watch now."

"I would n't mind anything, Johnny, if you would tell me that you loved me again. Perhaps I ought n't to ask you, and it is n't becoming in a lady; but how

can I help it, when you know you 've got my heart. Come upstairs and have tea with us now, won't you?"

What was he to do? He said that he would go up and have tea; and as he led her to the door he put down his face and kissed her. Oh, Johnny Eames! But then a woman in such a contest has so many points in her favour.

CHAPTER X

IS IT FROM HIM?

I HAVE already declared that Crosbie wrote and posted the fatal letter to Allington, and we must now follow it down to that place. On the morning following the squire's return to his own house, Mrs. Crump, the post-mistress at Allington, received a parcel by post directed to herself. She opened it, and found an enclosure addressed to Mrs. Dale, with a written request that she would herself deliver it into that lady's own hand at once. This was Crosbie's letter.

"It 's from Miss Lily's gentleman," said Mrs. Crump, looking at the handwriting. "There 's something up, or he would n't be writing to her mamma in this way." But Mrs. Crump lost no time in putting on her bonnet, and trudging up with the letter to the Small House. "I must see the missus herself," said Mrs. Crump. Whereupon Mrs. Dale was called downstairs into the hall, and there received the packet. Lily was in the breakfast-parlour, and had seen the post-mistress arrive;—had seen also that she carried a letter in her hand. For a moment she had thought that it was for her, and imagined that the old woman had brought it herself from simple good-nature. But Lily, when she heard her mother mentioned, instantly withdrew and shut the parlour door. Her heart misgave her that

something was wrong, but she hardly tried to think what it might be. After all, the regular postman might bring the letter she herself expected. Bell was not yet downstairs, and she stood alone over the tea-cups on the breakfast-table, feeling that there was something for her to fear. Her mother did not come at once into the room, but, after a pause of a moment or two, went again upstairs. So she remained, either standing against the table, or at the window, or seated in one of the two arm-chairs for a space of ten minutes, when Bell entered the room.

"Is n't mamma down yet?" said Bell.

"Bell," said Lily, "something has happened. Mamma has got a letter."

"Happened! What has happened? Is anybody ill? Who is the letter from?" And Bell was going to return through the door in search of her mother.

"Stop, Bell," said Lily. "Do not go to her yet. I think it 's from—Adolphus."

"Oh, Lily, what do you mean?"

"I don't know, dear. We 'll wait a little longer. Don't look like that, Bell." And Lily strove to appear calm, and strove almost successfully.

"You have frightened me so," said Bell.

"I am frightened myself. He only sent me one line yesterday, and now he has sent nothing. If some misfortune should have happened to him! Mrs. Crump brought down the letter herself to mamma, and that is odd, you know."

"Are you sure it was from him?"

"No; I have not spoken to her. I will go up to her now. Don't you come, Bell. Oh, Bell! do not look so unhappy." She then went over and kissed her

sister, and after that, with very gentle steps, made her way up to her mother's room. "Mamma, may I come in?" she said.

"Oh! my child!"

"I know it is from him, mamma. Tell me all at once."

Mrs. Dale had read the letter. With quick, glancing eyes, she had made herself mistress of its whole contents, and was already aware of the nature and extent of the sorrow which had come upon them. It was a sorrow that admitted of no hope. The man who had written that letter could never return again; nor if he should return could he be welcomed back to them. The blow had fallen, and it was to be borne. Inside the letter to herself had been a very small note addressed to Lily. "Give her the enclosed," Crosbie had said in his letter, "if you do not now think it wrong to do so. I have left it open, that you may read it." Mrs. Dale, however, had not yet read it, and she now concealed it beneath her handkerchief.

I will not repeat at length Crosbie's letter to Mrs. Dale. It covered four sides of letter-paper, and was such a letter that any man who wrote it must have felt himself to be a rascal. We saw that he had difficulty in writing it, but the miracle was, that any man could have found it possible to write it. "I know you will curse me," said he; "and I deserve to be cursed. I know that I shall be punished for this, and I must bear my punishment. My worst punishment will be this,—that I never more shall hold up my head again." And then, again, he said:—"My only excuse is my conviction that I should never make her happy. She has been brought up as an angel, with pure thoughts,

with holy hopes, with belief in all that is good, and high, and noble. I have been surrounded through my whole life by things low, and mean, and ignoble. How could I live with her, or she with me? I know now that this is so; but my fault has been that I did not know it when I was there with her. I choose to tell you all," he continued, towards the end of the letter, "and therefore I let you know that I have engaged myself to marry another woman. Ah! I can foresee how bitter will be your feelings when you read this: but they will not be so bitter as mine while I write it. Yes; I am already engaged to one who will suit me, and whom I may suit. You will not expect me to speak ill of her who is to be near and dear to me. But she is one with whom I may mate myself without an inward conviction that I shall destroy all her happiness by doing so. Lilian," he said, "shall always have my prayers; and I trust that she may soon forget, in the love of an honest man, that she ever knew one so dishonest as—Adolphus Crosbie."

Of what like must have been his countenance as he sat writing such words of himself under the ghastly light of his own small, solitary lamp? Had he written his letter at his office, in the daytime, with men coming in and out of his room, he could hardly have written of himself so plainly. He would have bethought himself that the written words might remain, and be read hereafter by other eyes than those for which they were intended. But, as he sat alone, during the small hours of the night, almost repenting of his sin with true repentance, he declared to himself that he did not care who might read them. They should, at any rate, be true. Now they had been read by her to whom they

had been addressed, and the daughter was standing before the mother to hear her doom.

"Tell me all at once," Lily had said; but in what words was her mother to tell her?

"Lily," she said, rising from her seat, and leaving the two letters on the couch; that addressed to the daughter was hidden beneath a handkerchief, but that which she had read she left open and in sight. She took both the girl's hands in hers as she looked into her face, and spoke to her. "Lily, my child!" Then she burst into sobs, and was unable to tell her tale.

"Is it from him, mamma? May I read it? He cannot be——"

"It is from Mr. Crosbie."

"Is he ill, mamma? Tell me at once. If he is ill I will go to him."

"No, my darling, he is not ill. Not yet;—do not read it yet. Oh, Lily! It brings bad news; very bad news."

"Mamma, if he is not in danger, I can read it. Is it bad to him, or only bad to me?"

At this moment the servant knocked, and not waiting for an answer, half opened the door.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Bernard is below, and wants to speak to you."

"Mr. Bernard! ask Miss Bell to see him."

"Miss Bell is with him, ma'am, but he says that he specially wants to speak to you."

Mrs. Dale felt that she could not leave Lily alone. She could not take the letter away, nor could she leave her child with the letter open.

"I cannot see him," said Mrs. Dale. "Ask him what it is. Tell him I cannot come down just at pres-

ent." And then the servant went, and Bernard left his message with Bell.

"Bernard," she had said, "do you know of anything? Is there anything wrong about Mr. Crosbie?" Then, in a few words, he told her all, and understanding why his aunt had not come down to him, he went back to the Great House. Bell, almost stupefied by the tidings, seated herself at the table unconsciously, leaning upon her elbows.

"It will kill her," she said to herself. "My Lily, my darling Lily! It will surely kill her!"

But the mother was still with the daughter, and the story was still untold.

"Mamma," said Lily, "whatever it is, I must, of course, be made to know it. I begin to guess the truth. It will pain you to say it. Shall I read the letter?"

Mrs. Dale was astonished at her calmness. It could not be that she had guessed the truth, or she would not stand like that, with tearless eyes and unquelled courage before her.

"You shall read it, but I ought to tell you first. Oh, my child, my own one!" Lily was now leaning against the bed, and her mother was standing over her, caressing her.

"Then tell me," said she. "But I know what it is. He has thought it all over while away from me, and he finds that it must not be as we have supposed. Before he went I offered to release him, and now he knows that he had better accept my offer. Is it so, mamma?" In answer to this Mrs. Dale did not speak, but Lily understood from her signs that it was so.

"He might have written it to me, myself," said Lily,

very proudly. "Mamma, we will go down to breakfast. He has sent nothing to me, then?"

"There is a note. He bids me read it, but I have not opened it. It is here."

"Give it me," said Lily, almost sternly. "Let me have his last words to me;" and she took the note from her mother's hands.

"Lily," said the note, "your mother will have told you all. Before you read these few words you will know that you have trusted one who was quite untrustworthy. I know that you will hate me.—I cannot even ask you to forgive me. You will let me pray that you may yet be happy.—A. C."

She read these few words, still leaning against the bed. Then she got up, and walking to a chair, seated herself with her back to her mother. Mrs. Dale moving silently after her stood over the back of the chair, not daring to speak to her. So she sat for some five minutes, with her eyes fixed upon the open window, and with Crosbie's note in her hand.

"I will not hate him, and I do forgive him," she said at last, struggling to command her voice, and hardly showing that she could not altogether succeed in her attempt. "I may not write to him again, but you shall write and tell him so. Now we will go down to breakfast." And so saying, she got up from her chair.

Mrs. Dale almost feared to speak to her, her composure was so complete, and her manner so stern and fixed. She hardly knew how to offer pity and sympathy, seeing that pity seemed to be so little necessary, and that even sympathy was not demanded. And she could not understand all that Lily had said. What

had she meant by the offer to release him? Had there, then, been some quarrel between them before he went? Crosbie had made no such allusion in his letter. But Mrs. Dale did not dare to ask any questions.

"You frighten me, Lily," she said. "Your very calmness frightens me."

"Dear mamma!" and the poor girl absolutely smiled as she embraced her mother. "You need not be frightened by my calmness. I know the truth well. I have been very unfortunate;—very. The brightest hopes of my life are all gone;—and I shall never again see him whom I love beyond all the world!" Then at last she broke down, and wept in her mother's arms.

There was not a word of anger spoken then against him who had done all this. Mrs. Dale felt that she did not dare to speak in anger against him, and words of anger were not likely to come from poor Lily. She, indeed, hitherto did not know the whole of his offence, for she had not read his letter.

"Give it me, mamma," she said at last. "It has to be done sooner or later."

"Not now, Lily. I have told you all,—all that you need know at present."

"Yes; now, mamma," and again that sweet silvery voice became stern. "I will read it now, and there shall be an end." Whereupon Mrs. Dale gave her the letter and she read it in silence. Her mother, though standing somewhat behind her, watched her narrowly as she did so. She was now lying over upon the bed, and the letter was on the pillow, as she propped herself upon her arm. Her tears were running, and ever and again she would stop to dry her eyes. Her sobs too

were very audible, but she went on steadily with her reading till she came to the line on which Crosbie told that he had already engaged himself to another woman. Then her mother could see that she paused suddenly, and that a shudder slightly convulsed all her limbs.

"He has been very quick," she said, almost in a whisper; and then she finished the letter. "Tell him, mamma," she said, "that I do forgive him, and I will not hate him. You will tell him that,—from me; will you not?" And then she raised herself from the bed.

Mrs. Dale would give her no such assurance. In her present mood her feelings against Crosbie were of a nature which she herself hardly could understand or analyse. She felt that if he were present she could almost fly at him as would a tigress. She had never hated before as she now hated this man. He was to her a murderer, and worse than a murderer. He had made his way like a wolf into her little fold, and torn her ewe-lamb and left her maimed and mutilated for life. How could a mother forgive such an offence as that, or consent to be the medium through which forgiveness should be expressed?

"You must, mamma; or, if you do not, I shall do so. Remember that I love him. You know what it is to have loved one single man. He has made me very unhappy; I hardly know yet how unhappy. But I have loved him and do love him. I believe, in my heart, that he still loves me. Where this has been there must not be hatred and unforgiveness."

"I will pray that I may become able to forgive him," said Mrs. Dale.

"But you must write to him those words. Indeed you must, mamma! 'She bids me tell you that she has

forgiven you, and will not hate you.' Promise me that!"

"I can make no promise now, Lily. I will think about it, and endeavour to do my duty."

Lily was now seated, and was holding the skirt of her mother's dress.

"Mamma," she said, looking up into her mother's face, "you must be very good to me now; and I must be very good to you. We shall be always together now. I must be your friend and counsellor; and be everything to you, more than ever. I must fall in love with you now;" and she smiled again, and the tears were almost dry upon her cheeks.

At last they went down to the breakfast room, from which Bell had not moved. Mrs. Dale entered the room first, and Lily followed, hiding herself for a moment behind her mother. Then she came forward boldly, and taking Bell in her arms, clasped her close to her bosom.

"Bell," she said, "he has gone."

"Lily! Lily! Lily!" said Bell, weeping.

"He has gone! We shall talk it over in a few days, and shall know how to do so without losing ourselves in misery. To-day we will say no more about it. I am so thirsty, Bell; do give me my tea;" and she sat herself down at the breakfast-table.

Lily's tea was given to her, and she drank it. Beyond that I cannot say that any of them partook with much heartiness of the meal. They sat there, as they would have sat if no terrible thunderbolt had fallen among them, and no word further was spoken about Crosbie and his conduct. Immediately after breakfast they went into the other room, and Lily, as was her

wont, sat herself immediately down to her drawing. Her mother looked at her with wistful eyes, longing to bid her spare herself, but she shrank from interfering with her. For a quarter of an hour Lily sat over her board, with her brush or pencil in her hand, and then she rose up and put it away.

"It is no good pretending," she said. "I am only spoiling the things; but I will be better to-morrow. I 'll go away and lie down by myself, mamma." And so she went.

Soon after this Mrs. Dale took her bonnet and went up to the Great House, having received her brother-in-law's message from Bell.

"I know what he has to tell me," she said; "but I might as well go. It will be necessary that we should speak to each other about it." So she walked across the lawn, and up into the hall of the Great House. "Is my brother in the book-room?" she said to one of the maids; and then knocking at the door, went in unannounced.

The squire rose from his arm-chair, and came forward to meet her.

"Mary," he said, "I believe you know it all."

"Yes," she said. "You can read that," and she handed him Crosbie's letter. "How was one to know that any man could be so wicked as that?"

"And she has heard it?" asked the squire. "Is she able to bear it?"

"Wonderfully! She has amazed me by her strength. It frightens me; for I know that a relapse must come. She has never sunk for a moment beneath it. For myself, I feel as though it were her strength that enables me to bear my share of it." And then she

described to the squire all that had taken place that morning.

"Poor child!" said the squire. "Poor child! What can we do for her? Would it be good for her to go away for a time? She is a sweet, good, lovely girl, and has deserved better than that. Sorrow and disappointment come to us all; but they are doubly heavy when they come so early."

Mrs. Dale was almost surprised at the amount of sympathy which he showed.

"And what is to be his punishment?" she asked.

"The scorn which men and women will feel for him; those, at least, whose esteem or scorn are matters of concern to any one. I know no other punishment. You would not have Lily's name brought before a tribunal of law?"

"Certainly not that."

"And I will not have Bernard calling him out. Indeed, it would be for nothing; for in these days a man is not expected to fight duels."

"You cannot think that I would wish that."

"What punishment is there, then? I know of none. There are evils which a man may do, and no one can punish him. I know of nothing. I went up to London after him, but he continued to crawl out of my way. What can you do to a rat but keep clear of him?"

Mrs. Dale had felt in her heart that it would be well if Crosbie could be beaten till all his bones were sore. I hardly know whether such should have been a woman's thought, but it was hers. She had no wish that he should be made to fight a duel. In that there would have been much that was wicked, and in her

estimation nothing that was just. But she felt that if Bernard would thrash the coward for his cowardice she would love her nephew better than ever she had loved him. Bernard also had considered it probable that he might be expected to horsewhip the man who had jilted his cousin, and, as regarded the absolute bodily risk, he would not have felt any insuperable objection to undertake the task. But such a piece of work was disagreeable to him in many ways. He hated the idea of a row at his club. He was most desirous that his cousin's name should not be made public. He wished to avoid anything that might be impolitic. A wicked thing had been done, and he was quite ready to hate Crosbie as Crosbie ought to be hated; but as regarded himself, it made him unhappy to think that the world might probably expect him to punish the man who had so lately been his friend. And then he did not know where to catch him, or how to thrash him when caught. He was very sorry for his cousin, and felt strongly that Crosbie should not be allowed to escape. But what was he to do?

"Would she like to go anywhere?" said the squire again, anxious, if he could, to afford solace by some act of generosity. At this moment he would have settled a hundred a year for life upon his niece if by so doing he could have done her any good.

"She will be better at home," said Mrs. Dale. "Poor thing. For a while she will wish to avoid going out."

"I suppose so;" and then there was a pause.

"I 'll tell you what, Mary; I don't understand it. On my honour I don't understand it. It is to me as wonderful as though I had caught the man picking my

pence out of my pocket. I don't think any man in the position of a gentleman would have done such a thing when I was young. I don't think any man would have dared to do it. But now it seems that a man may act in that way and no harm come to him. He had a friend in London who came to me and talked about it as though it were some ordinary, everyday transaction of life. Yes; you may come in, Bernard. The poor child knows it all now."

Bernard offered to his aunt what of solace and sympathy he had to offer, and made some sort of half-expressed apology for having introduced this wolf into their flock. "We always thought very much of him at his club," said Bernard.

"I don't know much about your London clubs now-a-days," said his uncle, "nor do I wish to do so if the society of that man can be endured after what he has now done."

"I don't suppose half-a-dozen men will ever know anything about it," said Bernard.

"Umph!" ejaculated the squire. He could not say that he wished Crosbie's villainy to be widely discussed, seeing that Lily's name was so closely connected with it. But yet he could not support the idea that Crosbie should not be punished by the frown of the world at large. It seemed to him that from this time forward any man speaking to Crosbie should be held to have disgraced himself by so doing.

"Give her my best love," he said, as Mrs. Dale got up to take her leave; "my very best love. If her old uncle can do anything for her she has only to let me know. She met the man in my house, and I feel that I owe her much. Bid her come and see me. It will

be better for her than moping at home. And Mary" —this he said to her, whispering into her ear—"think of what I said to you about Bell."

Mrs. Dale, as she walked back to her own house, acknowledged to herself that her brother-in-law's manner was different to her from anything that she had hitherto known of him.

During the whole of that day Crosbie's name was not mentioned at the Small House. Neither of the girls stirred out, and Bell spent the greater part of the afternoon sitting, with her arm round her sister's waist, upon the sofa. Each of them had a book; but though there was little spoken, there was as little read. Who can describe the thoughts that were passing through Lily's mind as she remembered the hours which she had passed with Crosbie, of his warm assurances of love, of his accepted caresses, of her uncontrolled and acknowledged joy in his affection? It had all been holy to her then; and now those things which were then sacred had been made almost disgraceful by his fault. And yet as she thought of this she declared to herself over and over again that she would forgive him;—nay, that she had forgiven him. "And he shall know it, too," she said, speaking almost out loud.

"Lily, dear Lily," said Bell, "turn your thoughts away from it for a while, if you can."

"They won't go away," said Lily. And that was all that was said between them on the subject.

Everybody would know it! I doubt whether that must not be one of the bitterest drops in the cup which a girl in such circumstances is made to drain. Lily perceived early in the day that the parlour-maid well knew that she had been jilted. The girl's manner was

intended to convey sympathy; but it did convey pity; and Lily for a moment felt angry. But she remembered that it must be so, and smiled upon the girl, and spoke kindly to her. What mattered it? All the world would know it in a day or two.

On the following day she went up, by her mother's advice, to see her uncle.

"My child," said he, "I am sorry for you. My heart bleeds for you."

"Uncle," she said, "do not mind it. Only do this for me,—do not talk about it,—I mean to me."

"No, no; I will not. That there should ever have been in my house so great a rascal——"

"Uncle! uncle! I will not have that! I will not listen to a word against him from any human being,—not a word! Remember that!" And her eyes flashed as she spoke.

He did not answer her, but took her hand and pressed it, and then she left him. "The Dales were ever constant!" he said to himself, as he walked up and down the terrace before his house. "Ever constant!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOUNDED FAWN.

NEARLY two months passed away, and it was now Christmas time at Allington. It may be presumed that there was no intention at either house that the mirth should be very loud. Such a wound as that received by Lily Dale was one from which recovery could not be quick, and it was felt by all the family that a weight was upon them which made gaiety impracticable. As for Lily herself it may be said that she bore her misfortune with all a woman's courage. For the first week she stood up as a tree that stands against the wind, which is soon to be shivered to pieces because it will not bend. During that week her mother and sister were frightened by her calmness and endurance. She would perform her daily task. She would go out through the village, and appear at her place in church on the first Sunday. She would sit over her book of an evening, keeping back her tears; and would chide her mother and sister when she found that they were regarding her with earnest anxiety.

"Mamma, let it all be as though it had never been," she said.

"Ah, dear! if that were but possible!"

"God forbid that it should be possible inwardly," Lily replied, "but it is possible outwardly. I feel that

you are more tender to me than you used to be, and that upsets me. If you would only scold me because I am idle, I should soon be better." But her mother could not speak to her as she perhaps might have spoken had no grief fallen upon her pet. She could not cease from those anxious tender glances which made Lily know that she was looked on as a fawn wounded almost to death.

At the end of the first week she gave way. "I won't get up, Bell," she said one morning, almost petulantly. "I am ill;—I had better lie here out of the way. Don't make a fuss about it. I 'm stupid and foolish, and that makes me ill."

Thereupon Mrs. Dale and Bell were frightened, and looked into each other's blank faces, remembering stories of poor broken-hearted girls who had died because their loves had been unfortunate,—as small wax tapers whose lights are quenched if a breath of wind blows upon them too strongly. But then Lily was in truth no such slight taper as that. Nor was she the stem that must be broken because it will not bend. She bent herself to the blast during that week of illness, and then arose with her form still straight and graceful, and with her bright light unquenched.

After that she would talk more openly to her mother about her loss,—openly and with a true appreciation of the misfortune which had befallen her; but with an assurance of strength which seemed to ridicule the idea of a broken heart. "I know that I can bear it," she said, "and that I can bear it without lasting unhappiness. Of course I shall always love him, and must feel almost as you felt when you lost my father."

In answer to this Mrs. Dale could say nothing. She

could not speak out her thoughts about Crosbie, and explain to Lily that he was unworthy of her love. Love does not follow worth, and is not given to excellence;—nor is it destroyed by ill-usage, nor killed by blows and mutilation. When Lily declared that she still loved the man who had so ill-used her, Mrs. Dale would be silent. Each perfectly understood the other, but on that matter even they could not interchange their thoughts with freedom.

"You must promise never to be tired of me, mamma," said Lily.

"Mothers do not often get tired of their children, whatever the children may do of their mothers."

"I 'm not so sure of that when the children turn out old maids. And I mean to have a will of my own, too, mamma; and a way also, if it be possible. When Bell is married I shall consider it a partnership, and I shan't do what I 'm told any longer."

"Forewarned will be forearmed."

"Exactly;—and I don't want to take you by surprise. For a year or two longer, till Bell is gone, I mean to be dutiful; but it would be very stupid for a girl to be dutiful all her life."

All of which Mrs. Dale understood thoroughly. It amounted to an assertion on Lily's part that she had loved once and could never love again; that she had played her game, hoping, as other girls hope, that she might win the prize of a husband; but that, having lost, she could never play the game again. It was that inward conviction on Lily's part which made her say such words to her mother. But Mrs. Dale would by no means allow herself to share this conviction. She declared to herself that time would cure Lily's

wound, and that her child might yet be crowned by the bliss of a happy marriage. She would not in her heart consent to that plan in accordance with which Lily's destiny in life was to be regarded as already fixed. She had never really liked Crosbie as a suitor, and would herself have preferred John Eames, with all the faults of his hobbledehoyhood on his head. It might yet come to pass that John Eames's love might be made happy.

But in the mean time Lily, as I have said, had become strong in her courage, and recommenced the work of living with no lackadaisical self-assurance that because she had been made more unhappy than others, therefore she should allow herself to be more idle. Morning and night she prayed for him, and daily, almost hour by hour, she assured herself that it was still her duty to love him. It was hard, this duty of loving, without any power of expressing such love. But still she would do her duty.

"Tell me at once, mamma," she said one morning, "when you hear that the day is fixed for his marriage. Pray don't keep me in the dark."

"It is to be in February," said Mrs. Dale.

"But let me know the day. It must not be to me like ordinary days. But do not look unhappy, mamma; I am not going to make a fool of myself. I shan't steal off and appear in the church like a ghost." And then, having uttered her little joke, a sob came, and she hid her face on her mother's bosom. In a moment she raised it again. "Believe me, mamma, that I am not unhappy," she said.

After the expiration of that second week Mrs. Dale did write a letter to Crosbie:

"I suppose" (she said) "it is right that I should acknowledge the receipt of your letter. I do not know that I have aught else to say to you. It would not become me as a woman to say what I think of your conduct, but I believe that your conscience will tell you the same things. If it do not, you must, indeed, be hardened. I have promised my child that I will send to you a message from her. She bids me tell you that she has forgiven you, and that she does not hate you. May God also forgive you, and may you recover His love.

"MARY DALE.

"I beg that no rejoinder may be made to this letter, either to myself or to any of my family."

The squire wrote no answer to the letter which he had received, nor did he take any steps towards the immediate punishment of Crosbie. Indeed he had declared that no such steps could be taken, explaining to his nephew that such a man could be served only as one serves a rat.

"I shall never see him," he said once again; "if I did, I should not scruple to hit him on the head with my stick; but I should think ill of myself to go after him with such an object."

And yet it was a terrible sorrow to the old man that the scoundrel who had so injured him and his should escape scot-free. He had not forgiven Crosbie. No idea of forgiveness had ever crossed his mind. He would have hated himself had he thought it possible that he could be induced to forgive such an injury. "There is an amount of rascality in it,—of low mean-

ness, which I do not understand," he would say over and over again to his nephew. And then as he would walk alone on the terrace he would speculate within his own mind whether Bernard would take any steps towards avenging his cousin's injury. "He is right," he would say to himself; "Bernard is quite right. But when I was young I could not have stood it. In those days a gentleman might have a fellow out who had treated him as he has treated us. A man was satisfied in feeling that he had done something. I suppose the world is different now-a-days." The world is different; but the squire by no means acknowledged in his heart that there had been any improvement.

Bernard also was greatly troubled in his mind. He would have had no objection to fight a duel with Crosbie, had duels in these days been possible. But he believed them to be no longer possible,—at any rate without ridicule. And if he could not fight the man, in what other way was he to punish him? Was it not the fact that for such a fault the world afforded no punishment? Was it not in the power of a man like Crosbie to amuse himself for a week or two at the expense of a girl's happiness for life, and then to escape absolutely without any ill effects to himself? "I shall be barred out of my club lest I should meet him," Bernard said to himself, "but he will not be barred out." Moreover, there was a feeling within him that the matter would be one of triumph to Crosbie rather than otherwise. In having secured for himself the pleasure of his courtship with such a girl as Lily Dale, without encountering the penalty usually consequent upon such amusement, he would be held by many as having merited much admiration. He had sinned against all the Dales,

and yet the suffering arising from his sin was to fall upon the Dales exclusively. Such was Bernard's reasoning, as he speculated on the whole affair, sadly enough,—wishing to be avenged, but not knowing where to look for vengeance. For myself I believe him to have been altogether wrong as to the light in which he supposed that Crosbie's falsehood would be regarded by Crosbie's friends. Men will still talk of such things lightly, professing that all is fair in love as it is in war, and speaking almost with envy of the good fortunes of a practised deceiver. But I have never come across the man who thought in this way with reference to an individual case. Crosbie's own judgment as to the consequences to himself of what he had done was more correct than that formed by Bernard Dale. He had regarded the act as venial as long as it was still to do,—while it was still within his power to leave it undone; but from the moment of its accomplishment it had forced itself upon his own view in its proper light. He knew that he had been a scoundrel, and he knew that other men would so think of him. His friend Fowler Pratt, who had the reputation of looking at women simply as toys, had so regarded him. Instead of boasting of what he had done, he was afraid of alluding to any matter connected with his marriage as a man is of talking of the articles which he has stolen. He had already felt that men at his club looked askance at him; and, though he was no coward as regarded his own skin and bones, he had an undefined fear lest some day he might encounter Bernard Dale purposely armed with a stick. The squire and his nephew were wrong in supposing that Crosbie was unpunished.

And as the winter came on he felt that he was closely watched by the noble family of De Courcy. Some of that noble family he had already learned to hate cordially. The Honourable John came up to town in November, and persecuted him vilely;—insisted upon having dinners given to him at Sebright's, upon smoking throughout the whole afternoon in his future brother-in-law's rooms, and upon borrowing his future brother-in-law's possessions; till at last Crosbie determined that it would be wise to quarrel with the Honourable John,—and he quarrelled with him accordingly, turning him out of his rooms, and telling him in so many words that he would have no more to do with him.

"You 'll have to do it, as I did," Mortimer Gagebee had said to him; "I did n't like it because of the family, but Lady Amelia told me that it must be so." Whereupon Crosbie took the advice of Mortimer Gagebee.

But the hospitality of the Gagebees was perhaps more distressing to him than even the importunities of the Honourable John. It seemed as though his future sister-in-law was determined not to leave him alone. Mortimer was sent to fetch him up for the Sunday afternoons, and he found that he was constrained to go to the villa in St. John's Wood, even in opposition to his own most strenuous will. He could not quite analyse the circumstances of his own position, but he felt as though he were a cock with his spurs cut off,—as a dog with his teeth drawn. He found himself becoming humble and meek. He had to acknowledge to himself that he was afraid of Lady Amelia, and almost even afraid of Mortimer Gagebee. He was aware that they watched him, and knew all his goings out

and comings in. They called him Adolphus, and made him tame. That coming evil day in February was dinned into his ears. Lady Amelia would go and look at furniture for him, and talked by the hour about bedding and sheets. "You had better get your kitchen things at Tomkins's. They 're all good, and he 'll give you ten per cent. off if you pay him ready-money,—which of course you will, you know?" Was it for this that he had sacrificed Lily Dale?—for this that he had allied himself with the noble house of De Courcy?

Mortimer had been at him about the settlements from the very first moment of his return to London, and had already bound him up hand and foot. His life was insured, and the policy was in Mortimer's hands. His own little bit of money had been already handed over to be tied up with Lady Alexandrina's little bit. It seemed to him that in all the arrangements made the intention was that he should die off speedily, and that Lady Alexandrina should be provided with a decent little income, sufficient for St. John's Wood. Things were to be so settled that he could not even spend the proceeds of his own money, or of hers. They were to go, under the fostering hand of Mortimer Gagebee, in paying insurances. If he would only die the day after his marriage, there would really be a very nice sum of money for Alexandrina, almost worthy of the acceptance of an earl's daughter. Six months ago he would have considered himself able to turn Mortimer Gagebee round his finger on any subject that could be introduced between them. When they chanced to meet Gagebee had been quite humble to him, treating him almost as a superior being. He had looked down on Gagebee from a very

great height. But now it seemed as though he were powerless in this man's hands.

But perhaps the countess had become his greatest aversion. She was perpetually writing to him little notes in which she gave him multitudes of commissions, sending him about as though he had been her servant. And she pestered him with advice which was even worse than her commissions, telling him of the style of life in which Alexandrina would expect to live, and warning him very frequently that such an one as he could not expect to be admitted within the bosom of so noble a family without paying very dearly for that inestimable privilege. Her letters had become odious to him, and he would chuck them on one side, leaving them for the whole day unopened. He had already made up his mind that he would quarrel with the countess also, very shortly after his marriage; indeed, that he would separate himself from the whole family if it were possible. And yet he had entered into this engagement mainly with the view of reaping those advantages which would accrue to him from being allied to the De Courcys! The squire and his nephew were wretched in thinking that this man was escaping without punishment, but they might have spared themselves that misery.

It had been understood from the first that he was to spend his Christmas at Courcy Castle. From this undertaking it was quite out of his power to enfranchise himself; but he resolved that his visit should be as short as possible. Christmas Day unfortunately came on a Monday, and it was known to the De Courcy world that Saturday was almost a *dies non* at the General Committee Office. As to those three days there

was no escape for him; but he made Alexandrina understand that the three Commissioners were men of iron as to any extension of those three days. "I must be absent again in February, of course," he said, almost making his wail audible in the words he used, "and therefore it is quite impossible that I should stay now beyond the Monday." Had there been attractions for him at Courcy Castle I think he might have arranged with Mr. Optimist for a week or ten days. "We shall be all alone," the countess wrote to him, "and I hope you will have an opportunity of learning more of our ways than you have ever really been able to do as yet." This was bitter as gall to him. But in this world all valuable commodities have their price; and when men such as Crosbie aspire to obtain for themselves an alliance with noble families, they must pay the market price for the article which they purchase.

"You 'll all come up and dine with us on Monday," the squire said to Mrs. Dale, about the middle of the previous week.

"Well, I think not," said Mrs. Dale; "we are better, perhaps, as we are."

At this moment the squire and his sister-in-law were on much more friendly terms than had been usual with them, and he took her reply in good part, understanding her feeling. Therefore, he pressed his request, and succeeded.

"I think you 're wrong," he said; "I don't suppose that we shall have a very merry Christmas. You and the girls will hardly have that whether you eat your pudding here or at the Great House. But it will be better for us all to make the attempt. It 's the right thing to do. That 's the way I look at it."

"I 'll ask Lily," said Mrs. Dale.

"Do, do. Give her my love, and tell her from me that, in spite of all that has come and gone, Christmas Day should still be to her a day of rejoicing. We 'll dine about three, so that the servants can have the afternoon."

"Of course we 'll go," said Lily; "why not? We always do. And we 'll have blind-man's-buff with all the Boyces, as we had last year, if uncle will ask them up." But the Boyces were not asked up for that occasion.

But Lily, though she put on it all so brave a face, had much to suffer, and did in truth suffer greatly. If you, my reader, ever chanced to slip into the gutter on a wet day, did you not find that the sympathy of the bystanders was by far the severest part of your misfortune? Did you not declare to yourself that all might yet be well, if the people would only walk on and not look at you? And yet you cannot blame those who stood and pitied you; or, perhaps, essayed to rub you down, and assist you in the recovery of your bedaubed hat. You, yourself, if you see a man fall, cannot walk by as though nothing uncommon had happened to him. It was so with Lily. The people of Allington could not regard her with their ordinary eyes. They would look at her tenderly, knowing that she was a wounded fawn, and thus they aggravated the soreness of her wound. Old Mrs. Hearn condoled with her, telling her that very likely she would be better off as she was. Lily would not lie about it in any way. "Mrs. Hearn," she said, "the subject is painful to me." Mrs. Hearn said no more about it, but on every meeting between them she looked the things she did not

say. "Miss Lily!" said Hopkins, one day, "Miss Lily!"—and as he looked up into her face a tear had almost formed itself in his old eye—"I knew what he was from the first. Oh, dear! oh, dear! if I could have had him killed!" "Hopkins, how dare you?" said Lily. "If you speak to me again in such a way, I will tell my uncle." She turned away from him; but immediately turned back again, and put out her little hand to him. "I beg your pardon," she said. "I know how kind you are, and I love you for it." And then she went away. "I 'll go after him yet, and break the dirty neck of him," said Hopkins to himself, as he walked down the path.

Shortly before Christmas Day she called with her sister at the vicarage. Bell, in the course of the visit, left the room with one of the Boyce girls, to look at the last chrysanthemums of the year. Then Mrs. Boyce took advantage of the occasion to make her little speech. "My dear Lily," she said, "you will think me cold if I do not say one word to you."

"No, I shall not," said Lily, almost sharply, shrinking from the finger that threatened to touch her sore. "There are things which should never be talked about."

"Well, well; perhaps so," said Mrs. Boyce. But for a minute or two she was unable to fall back upon any other topic, and sat looking at Lily with painful tenderness. I need hardly say what were Lily's sufferings under such a gaze; but she bore it, acknowledging to herself in her misery that the fault did not lie with Mrs. Boyce. How could Mrs. Boyce have looked at her otherwise than tenderly?

It was settled, then, that Lily was to dine up at the Great House on Christmas Day, and thus show to the

Allington world that she was not to be regarded as a person shut out from the world by the depth of her misfortune. That she was right there can, I think, be no doubt; but as she walked across the little bridge, with her mother and sister, after returning from church, she would have given much to be able to have turned round, and have gone to bed instead of to her uncle's dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

PAWKINS'S IN JERMYN STREET.

THE show of fat beasts in London took place this year on the twentieth day of December, and I have always understood that a certain bullock exhibited by Lord De Guest was declared by the metropolitan butchers to have realised all the possible excellences of breeding, feeding, and condition. No doubt the butchers of the next half-century will have learned much better, and the Guestwick beast, could it be embalmed and then produced, would excite only ridicule at the agricultural ignorance of the present age; but Lord De Guest took the praise that was offered to him, and found himself in a seventh heaven of delight. He was never so happy as when surrounded by butchers, graziers, and salesmen who were able to appreciate the work of his life, and who regarded him as a model nobleman. "Look at that fellow," he said to Eames, pointing to the prize bullock. Eames had joined his patron at the show after his office hours, looking on upon the living beef by gaslight. "Is n't he like his sire? He was got by Lambkin, you know."

"Lambkin," said Johnny, who had not as yet been able to learn much about the Guestwick stock.

"Yes, Lambkin. The bull that we had the trouble with. He has just got his sire's back and fore-quarters. Don't you see?"

"I dare say," said Johnny, who looked very hard, but could not see.

"It 's very odd," exclaimed the earl, "but do you know, that bull has been as quiet since that day,—as quiet as—as anything. I think it must have been my pocket-handkerchief."

"I dare say it was," said Johnny;—"or perhaps the flies."

"Flies!" said the earl, angrily. "Do you suppose he is n't used to flies? Come away. I ordered dinner at seven, and it 's past six now. My brother-in-law, Colonel Dale, is up in town, and he dines with us." So he took Johnny's arm, and led him off through the show, calling his attention as he went to several beasts which were inferior to his own.

And then they walked down through Portman Square and Grosvenor Square, and across Piccadilly to Jermyn Street. John Eames acknowledged to himself that it was odd that he should have an earl leaning on his arm as he passed along through the streets. At home, in his own life, his daily companions were Cradell and Amelia Roper, Mrs. Lupex and Mrs. Roper. The difference was very great, and yet he found it quite as easy to talk to the earl as to Mrs. Lupex.

"You know the Dales down at Allington, of course," said the earl.

"Oh, yes, I know them."

"But, perhaps, you never met the colonel."

"I don't think I ever did."

"He 's a queer sort of fellow;—very well in his way, but he never does anything. He and my sister live at Torquay, and as far as I can find out, they

neither of them have any occupation of any sort. He 's come up to town now because we both had to meet our family lawyers and sign some papers, but he looks on the journey as a great hardship. As for me, I 'm a year older than he is, but I would n't mind going up and down from Guestwick every day."

"It 's looking after the bull that does it," said Eames.

"By George! you 're right, Master Johnny. My sister and Crofts may tell me what they like, but when a man's out in the open air for eight or nine hours every day, it does n't much matter where he goes to sleep after that. This is Pawkins's,—capital good house, but not so good as it used to be while old Pawkins was alive. Show Mr. Eames up into a bedroom to wash his hands."

Colonel Dale was much like his brother in face, but was taller, even thinner, and apparently older. When Eames went into the sitting-room, the colonel was there alone, and had to take upon himself the trouble of introducing himself. He did not get up from his arm-chair, but nodded gently at the young man. "Mr. Eames, I believe? I knew your father at Guestwick, a great many years ago;" then he turned his face back towards the fire and sighed.

"It 's got very cold this afternoon," said Johnny, trying to make conversation.

"It 's always cold in London," said the colonel.

"If you had to be here in August you would n't say so."

"God forbid," said the colonel, and he sighed again, with his eyes fixed upon the fire. Eames had heard of the very gallant way in which Orlando Dale had persisted in running away with Lord De Guest's sister,

in opposition to very terrible obstacles, and as he now looked at the intrepid lover, he thought that there must have been a great change since those days. After that nothing more was said till the earl came down.

Pawkins's house was thoroughly old-fashioned in all things, and the Pawkins of that day himself stood behind the earl's elbow when the dinner began, and himself removed the cover from the soup tureen. Lord De Guest did not require much personal attention, but he would have felt annoyed if this had n't been done. As it was he had a civil word to say to Pawkins about the fat cattle, thereby showing that he did not mistake Pawkins for one of the waiters. Pawkins then took his lordship's orders about the wine and retired.

"He keeps up the old house pretty well," said the earl to his brother-in-law. "It is n't like what it was thirty years ago, but then everything of that sort has got worse and worse."

"I suppose it has," said the colonel.

"I remember when old Pawkins had as good a glass of port as I 've got at home,—or nearly. They can't get it now, you know."

"I never drink port," said the colonel. "I seldom take anything after dinner, except a little negus."

His brother-in-law said nothing, but made a most eloquent grimace as he turned his face towards his soup-plate. Eames saw it, and could hardly refrain from laughing. When, at half-past nine o'clock, the colonel retired from the room, the earl, as the door was closed, threw up his hands, and uttered the one word "negus!" Then Eames took heart of grace and had his laughter out.

The dinner was very dull, and before the colonel

went to bed Johnny regretted that he had been induced to dine at Pawkins's. It might be a very fine thing to be asked to dinner with an earl, and John Eames had perhaps received at his office some little accession of dignity from the circumstance, of which he had been not unpleasantly aware; but, as he sat at the table, on which there were four or five apples and a plate of dried nuts, looking at the earl, as he endeavoured to keep his eyes open, and at the colonel, to whom it seemed absolutely a matter of indifference whether his companions were asleep or awake, he confessed to himself that the price he was paying was almost too dear. Mrs. Roper's tea-table was not pleasant to him, but even that would have been preferable to the black dinginess of Pawkins's mahogany, with the company of two tired old men, with whom he seemed to have no mutual subject of conversation. Once or twice he tried a word with the colonel, for the colonel sat with his eyes open looking at the fire. But he was answered with monosyllables, and it was evident to him that the colonel did not wish to talk. To sit still, with his hands closed over each other on his lap, was work enough for Colonel Dale during his after-dinner hours.

But the earl knew what was going on. During that terrible conflict between him and his slumber, in which the drowsy god fairly vanquished him for some twenty minutes, his conscience was always accusing him of treating his guests badly. He was very angry with himself, and tried to arouse himself and talk. But his brother-in-law would not help him in his efforts; and even Eames was not bright in rendering him assistance. Then for twenty minutes he slept soundly, and at the end of that he woke himself with one of his own snorts.

"By George!" he said, jumping up and standing on the rug, "we 'll have some coffee;" and after that he did not sleep any more.

"Dale," said he, "won't you take some more wine?"

"Nothing more," said the colonel, still looking at the fire, and shaking his head very slowly.

"Come, Johnny, fill your glass." He had already got into the way of calling his young friend Johnny, having found that Mrs. Eames generally spoke of her son by that name.

"I have been filling my glass all the time," said Eames, taking the decanter again in his hand as he spoke.

"I 'm glad you 've found something to amuse you, for it has seemed to me that you and Dale have n't had much to say to each other. I 've been listening all the time."

"You 've been asleep," said the colonel.

"Then there 's been some excuse for my holding my tongue," said the earl. "By-the-bye, Dale, what do you think of that fellow Crosbie?"

Eames's ears were instantly on the alert, and the spirit of dulness vanished from him.

"Think of him?" said the colonel.

"He ought to have every bone in his skin broken," said the earl.

"So he ought," said Eames, getting up from his chair in his eagerness, and speaking in a tone somewhat louder than was perhaps becoming in the presence of his seniors. "So he ought, my lord. He is the most abominable rascal that ever I met in my life. I wish I was Lily Dale's brother." Then he sat down again, remembering that he was speaking in the presence of

Lily's uncle, and of the father of Bernard Dale, who might be supposed to occupy the place of Lily's brother.

The colonel turned his head round, and looked at the young man with surprise. "I beg your pardon, sir," said Eames, "but I have known Mrs. Dale and your nieces all my life."

"Oh, have you?" said the colonel. "Nevertheless it is, perhaps, as well not to make too free with a young lady's name. Not that I blame you in the least, Mr. Eames."

"I should think not," said the earl. "I honour him for his feeling. Johnny, my boy, if ever I am unfortunate enough to meet that man, I shall tell him my mind, and I believe you will do the same." On hearing this John Eames winked at the earl, and made a motion with his head towards the colonel, whose back was turned to him. And then the earl winked back at Eames.

"De Guest," said the colonel, "I think I 'll go upstairs; I always have a little arrowroot in my own room."

"I 'll ring the bell for a candle," said the host. Then the colonel went, and as the door was closed behind him, the earl raised his two hands and uttered that single word, "negus!" Whereupon Johnny burst out laughing, and coming round to the fire, sat himself down in the arm-chair which the colonel had left.

"I 've no doubt it 's all right," said the earl; "but I should n't like to drink negus myself, nor yet to have arrowroot up in my bedroom."

"I don't suppose there 's any harm in it."

"Oh dear, no; I wonder what Pawkins says about

him. But I suppose they have them of all sorts in an hotel."

"The waiter did n't seem to think much of it when he brought it."

"No, no. If he 'd asked for senna and salts, the waiter would n't have showed any surprise. By-the-bye, you touched him up about that poor girl."

"Did I, my lord? I did n't mean it."

"You see he 's Bernard Dale's father, and the question is, whether Bernard should n't punish the fellow for what he has done. Somebody ought to do it. It is n't right that he should escape. Somebody ought to let Mr. Crosbie know what a scoundrel he has made himself."

"I 'd do it to-morrow, only I 'm afraid——"

"No, no, no," said the earl; "you are not the right person at all. What have you got to do with it? You 've merely known them as family friends, but that 's not enough."

"No, I suppose not," said Eames, sadly.

"Perhaps it 's best as it is," said the earl. "I don't know that any good would be got by knocking him over the head. And if we are to be Christians, I suppose we ought to be Christians."

"What sort of a Christian has he been?"

"That 's true enough; and if I was Bernard, I should be very apt to forget my Bible lessons about meekness."

"Do you know, my lord, I should think it the most Christian thing in the world to pitch into him; I should, indeed. There are some things for which a man ought to be beaten black and blue."

"So that he should n't do them again?"

"Exactly. You might say it is n't Christian to hang a man."

"I 'd always hang a murderer. It was n't right to hang men for stealing sheep."

"Much better hang such a fellow as Crosbie," said Eames.

"Well, I believe so. If any fellow wanted now to curry favour with the young lady, what an opportunity he 'd have."

Johnny remained silent for a moment or two before he answered.

"I 'm not so sure of that," he said, mournfully, as though grieving at the thought that there was no chance of currying favour with Lily by thrashing her late lover.

"I don't pretend to know much about girls," said Lord De Guest; "but I should think it would be so. I should fancy that nothing would please her so much as hearing that he had caught it, and that all the world knew that he 'd caught it." The earl had declared that he did n't know much about girls, and in so saying, he was no doubt right.

"If I thought so," said Eames, "I 'd find him out to-morrow."

"Why so? what difference does it make to you?" Then there was another pause, during which Johnny looked very sheepish.

"You don't mean to say that you 're in love with Miss Lily Dale?"

"I don't know much about being in love with her," said Johnny, turning very red as he spoke. And then he made up his mind, in a wild sort of way, to tell all the truth to his friend. Pawkins's port wine may, per-

haps, have had something to do with the resolution. "But I 'd go through fire and water for her, my lord. I knew her years before he had ever seen her, and have loved her a great deal better than he will ever love any one. When I heard that she had accepted him, I had half a mind to cut my own throat,—or else his."

"Highty tighty," said the earl.

"It 's very ridiculous, I know," said Johnny, "and of course she would never have accepted me."

"I don't see that at all."

"I have n't a shilling in the world."

"Girls don't care much for that."

"And then a clerk in the Income-tax Office! It 's such a poor thing."

"The other fellow was only a clerk in another office."

The earl living down at Guestwick did not understand that the Income-tax Office in the city, and the General Committee Office at Whitehall, were as far apart as Dives and Lazarus, and separated by as impassable a gulf.

"Oh, yes," said Johnny; "but his office is another kind of thing, and then he was a swell himself."

"By George, I don't see it," said the earl.

"I don't wonder a bit at her accepting a fellow like that. I hated him the first moment I saw him; but that 's no reason she should hate him. He had that sort of manner, you know. He was a swell, and girls like that kind of thing. I never felt angry with her, but I could have eaten him." As he spoke he looked as though he would have made some such attempt had Crosbie been present.

"Did you ever ask her to have you?" said the earl,

"No; how could I ask her, when I had n't bread to give her?"

"And you never told her—that you were in love with her, I mean, and all that kind of thing."

"She knows it now," said Johnny; "I went to say good-bye to her the other day,—when I thought she was going to be married. I could not help telling her then."

"But it seems to me, my dear fellow, that you ought to be very much obliged to Crosbie;—that is to say, if you 've a mind to——"

"I know what you mean, my lord. I am not a bit obliged to him. It 's my belief that all this will about kill her. As to myself, if I thought she 'd ever have me——"

Then he was again silent, and the earl could see that the tears were in his eyes.

"I think I begin to understand it," said the earl, "and I 'll give you a bit of advice. You come down and spend your Christmas with me at Guestwick."

"Oh, my lord!"

"Never mind my-lording me, but do as I tell you. Lady Julia sent you a message, though I forgot all about it till now. She wants to thank you herself for what you did in the field."

"That 's all nonsense, my lord."

"Very well; you can tell her so. You may take my word for this, too,—my sister hates Crosbie quite as much as you do. I think she 'd 'pitch into him,' as you call it, herself, if she knew how. You come down to Guestwick for the Christmas, and then go over to Allington and tell them all plainly what you mean."

"I could n't say a word to her now."

"Say it to the squire, then. Go to him, and tell him what you mean,—holding your head up like a man. Don't talk to me about swells. The man who means honestly is the best swell I know. He 's the only swell I recognise. Go to old Dale, and say you come from me,—from Guestwick Manor. Tell him that if he 'll put a little stick under the pot to make it boil, I 'll put a bigger one. He 'll understand what that means."

"Oh, no, my lord."

"But I say, oh, yes;" and the earl, who was now standing on the rug before the fire, dug his hands deep down into his trousers pockets. "I 'm very fond of that girl, and would do much for her. You ask Lady Julia if I did n't say so to her before I ever knew of your casting a sheep's-eye that way. And I 've a sneaking kindness for you too, Master Johnny. Lord bless you, I knew your father as well as I ever knew any man; and to tell the truth, I believe I helped to ruin him. He held land of me, you know, and there can't be any doubt that he did ruin himself. He knew no more about a beast when he 'd done, than—than —than that waiter. If he 'd gone on to this day he would n't have been any wiser."

Johnny sat silent, with his eyes full of tears. What was he to say to his friend?

"You come down with me," continued the earl, "and you 'll find we 'll make it all straight. I dare say you 're right about not speaking to the girl just at present. But tell everything to the uncle, and then to the mother. And, above all things, never think that you 're not good enough yourself. A man should never think that. My belief is that in life people will

take you very much at your own reckoning. If you are made of dirt, like that fellow Crosbie, you 'll be found out at last, no doubt. But then I don't think you are made of dirt."

"I hope not."

"And so do I. You can come down, I suppose, with me the day after to-morrow?"

"I 'm afraid not. I have had all my leave."

"Shall I write to old Buffle, and ask it as a favour?"

"No," said Johnny; "I should n't like that. But I 'll see to-morrow, and then I 'll let you know. I can go down by the mail train on Saturday, at any rate."

"That won't be comfortable. See and come with me if you can. Now, good-night, my dear fellow, and remember this,—when I say a thing I mean it. I think I may boast that I never yet went back from my word."

The earl as he spoke gave his left hand to his guest, and looking somewhat grandly up over the young man's head, he tapped his own breast thrice with his right hand. As he went through the little scene, John Eames felt that he was every inch an earl.

"I don't know what to say to you, my lord."

"Say nothing,—not a word more to me. But say to yourself that faint heart never won fair lady. Good-night, my dear boy, good-night. I dine out to-morrow, but you can call and let me know at about six."

Eames then left the room without another word, and walked out into the cold air of Jermyn Street. The moon was clear and bright, and the pavement in the shining light seemed to be as clean as a lady's hand. All the world was altered to him since he had

entered Pawkins's Hotel. Was it then possible that Lily Dale might even yet become his wife? Could it be true that he, even now, was in a position to go boldly to the Squire of Allington, and tell him what were his views with reference to Lily? And how far would he be justified in taking the earl at his word? Some incredible amount of wealth would be required before he could marry Lily Dale. Two or three hundred pounds a year at the very least! The earl could not mean him to understand that any such sum as that would be made up with such an object! Nevertheless he resolved as he walked home to Burton Crescent that he would go down to Guestwick, and that he would obey the earl's behest. As regarded Lily herself he felt that nothing could be said to her for many a long day as yet.

"Oh, John, how late you are!" said Amelia, slipping out from the back parlour, as he let himself in with his latch key.

"Yes, I am;—very late," said John, taking his candle, and passing her by on the stairs without another word.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE TIME WILL COME."

"DID you hear that young Eames is staying at Guestwick Manor?"

As these were the first words which the squire spoke to Mrs. Dale as they walked together up to the Great House, after church, on Christmas Day, it was clear enough that the tidings of Johnny's visit, when told to him, had made some impression.

"At Guestwick Manor!" said Mrs. Dale. "Dear me! Do you hear that, Bell? There 's promotion for Master Johnny!"

"Don't you remember, mamma," said Bell, "that he helped his lordship in his trouble with the bull?"

Lily, who remembered accurately all the passages of her last interview with John Eames, said nothing, but felt, in some sort, sore at the idea that he should be so near her at such a time. In some unconscious way she had liked him for coming to her and saying all that he did say. She valued him more highly after that scene than she did before. But now, she would feel herself injured and hurt if he ever made his way into her presence under circumstances as they existed.

"I should not have thought that Lord De Guest was the man to show so much gratitude for so slight a favour," said the squire. "However, I am going to dine there to-morrow."

"To meet young Eames?" said Mrs. Dale.

"Yes,—especially to meet young Eames. At least, I 've been very specially asked to come, and I 've been told that he is to be there."

"And is Bernard going?"

"Indeed I 'm not," said Bernard. "I shall come over and dine with you."

A half-formed idea flitted across Lily's mind, teaching her to imagine for a moment that she might possibly be concerned in this arrangement. But the thought vanished as quickly as it came, merely leaving some soreness behind it. There are certain maladies which make the whole body sore. The patient, let him be touched on any point,—let him even be nearly touched,—will roar with agony as though his whole body had been bruised. So it is also with maladies of the mind. Sorrows such as that of poor Lily's leave the heart sore at every point, and compel the sufferer to be ever in fear of new wounds. Lily bore her cross bravely and well; but not the less did it weigh heavily upon her at every turn because she had the strength to walk as though she did not bear it. Nothing happened to her, or in her presence, that did not in some way connect itself with her misery. Her uncle was going over to meet John Eames at Lord De Guest's. Of course the men there would talk about her, and all such talking was an injury to her.

The afternoon of that day did not pass away brightly. As long as the servants were in the room the dinner went on much as other dinners. At such times a certain amount of hypocrisy must always be practised in closely domestic circles. At mixed dinner-parties people can talk before Richard and William

the same words that they would use if Richard and William were not there. People so mixed do not talk together their inward home thoughts. But when close friends are together, a little conscious reticence is practised till the door is tiled. At such a meeting as this that conscious reticence was of service, and created an effort which was salutary. When the door was tiled, and when the servants were gone, how could they be merry together? By what mirth should the beards be made to wag on that Christmas Day?

"My father has been up in town," said Bernard. "He was with Lord De Guest at Pawkins's."

"Why did n't you go and see him?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"Well, I don't know. He did not seem to wish it. I shall go down to Torquay in February. I must be up in London, you know, in a fortnight, for good." Then they were all silent again for a few minutes. If Bernard could have owned the truth, he would have acknowledged that he had not gone up to London, because he did not yet know how to treat Crosbie when he should meet him. His thoughts on this matter threw some sort of shadow across poor Lily's mind, making her feel that her wound was again opened.

"I want him to give up his profession altogether," said the squire, speaking firmly and slowly. "It would be better, I think, for both of us that he should do so."

"Would it be wise at his time of life," said Mrs. Dale, "and when he has been doing so well?"

"I think it would be wise. If he were my son it would be thought better that he should live here upon the property, among the people who are to become his tenants, than remain up in London, or perhaps be

sent to India. He has one profession as the heir of this place, and that, I think, should be enough."

"I should have but an idle life of it down here," said Bernard.

"That would be your own fault. But if you did as I would have you, your life would not be idle." In this he was alluding to Bernard's proposed marriage, but as to that nothing further could be said in Bell's presence. Bell understood it all, and sat quite silent, with demure countenance;—perhaps even with something of sternness in her face.

"But the fact is," said Mrs. Dale, speaking in a low tone, and having well considered what she was about to say, "that Bernard is not exactly the same as your son."

"Why not?" said the squire. "I have even offered to settle the property on him if he will leave the service."

"You do not owe him so much as you would owe your son; and, therefore, he does not owe you as much as he would owe his father."

"If you mean that I cannot constrain him, I know that well enough. As regards money, I have offered to do for him quite as much as any father would feel called upon to do for an only son."

"I hope you don't think me ungrateful," said Bernard.

"No, I do not; but I think you unmindful. I have nothing more to say about it, however;—not about that. If you should marry——" And then he stopped himself, feeling that he could not go on in Bell's presence.

"If he should marry," said Mrs. Dale, "it may well be that his wife would like a house of her own."

"Would n't she have this house?" said the squire, angrily. "Is n't it big enough? I only want one room for myself, and I 'd give up that if it were necessary."

"That 's nonsense," said Mrs. Dale.

"It is n't nonsense," said the squire.

"You 'll be squire of Allington for the next twenty years," said Mrs. Dale. "And as long as you are the squire, you 'll be master of this house; at least, I hope so. I don't approve of monarchs abdicating in favour of young people."

"I don't think uncle Christopher would look at all well like Charles the Fifth," said Lily.

"I would always keep a cell for you, my darling, if I did," said the squire, regarding her with that painful, special tenderness. Lily, who was sitting next to Mrs. Dale, put her hand out secretly and got hold of her mother's, thereby indicating that she did not intend to occupy the cell offered to her by her uncle; or to look to him as the companion of her monastic seclusion. After that there was nothing more then said as to Bernard's prospects.

"Mrs. Hearn is dining at the vicarage, I suppose?" asked the squire.

"Yes; she went in after church," said Bell. "I saw her go with Mrs. Boyce."

"She told me she never would dine with them again after dark in winter," said Mrs. Dale. "The last time she was there, the boy let the lamp blow out as she was going home, and she lost her way. The truth was, she was angry because Mr. Boyce did n't go with her."

"She 's always angry," said the squire. "She hardly

speaks to me now. When she paid her rent the other day to Jolliffe, she said she hoped it would do me much good; as though she thought me a brute for taking it."

"So she does," said Bernard.

"She 's very old, you know," said Bell.

"I 'd give her the house for nothing, if I were you, uncle," said Lily.

"No, my dear; if you were me you would not. I should be very wrong to do so. Why should Mrs. Hearn have her house for nothing, any more than her meat or her clothes? It would be much more reasonable were I to give her so much money into her hand yearly; but it would be wrong in me to do so, seeing that she is not an object of charity;—and it would be wrong in her to take it."

"And she would n't take it," said Mrs. Dale.

"I don't think she would. But if she did, I 'm sure she would grumble because it was n't double the amount. And if Mr. Boyce had gone home with her, she would have grumbled because he walked too fast."

"She is very old," said Bell, again.

"But, nevertheless, she ought to know better than to speak disparagingly of me to my servants. She should have more respect for herself." And the squire showed by the tone of his voice that he thought very much about it.

It was very long and very dull that Christmas evening, making Bernard feel strongly that he would be very foolish to give up his profession, and tie himself down to a life at Allington. Women are more accustomed than men to long, dull, unemployed hours; and, therefore, Mrs. Dale and her daughters bore the tedium

courageously. While he yawned, stretched himself, and went in and out of the room, they sat demurely, listening as the squire laid down the law on small matters, and contradicting him occasionally when the spirit of either of them prompted her specially to do so. "Of course you know much better than I do," he would say. "Not at all," Mrs. Dale would answer. "I don't pretend to know anything about it. But——" So the evening wore itself away; and when the squire was left alone at half-past nine, he did not feel that the day had passed badly with him. That was his style of life, and he expected no more from it than he got. He did not look to find things very pleasant, and, if not happy, he was, at any rate, contented.

"Only think of Johnny Eames being at Guestwick Manor!" said Bell, as they were going home.

"I don't see why he should n't be there," said Lily. "I would rather it should be he than I, because Lady Julia is so grumpy."

"But asking your uncle Christopher especially to meet him!" said Mrs. Dale. "There must be some reason for it." Then Lily felt the soreness come upon her again, and spoke no further upon the subject.

We all know that there was a special reason, and that Lily's soreness was not false in its mysterious forebodings. Eames, on the evening after his dinner at Pawkins's, had seen the earl, and explained to him that he could not leave town till the Saturday evening; but that he could remain over the Tuesday. He must be at his office by twelve on Wednesday, and could manage to do that by an early train from Guestwick.

"Very well, Johnny," said the earl, talking to his young friend with the bedroom candle in his hand, as

he was going up to dress. "Then I 'll tell you what; I 've been thinking of it. I 'll ask Dale to come over to dinner on Tuesday; and if he 'll come, I 'll explain the whole matter to him myself. He 's a man of business, and he 'll understand. If he won't come, why then you must go over to Allington, and find him, if you can, on the Tuesday morning; or I 'll go to him myself, which will be better. You must n't keep me now, as I am ever so much too late."

Eames did not attempt to keep him, but went away feeling that the whole matter was being arranged for him in a very wonderful way. And when he got to Allington he found that the squire had accepted the earl's invitation. Then he declared to himself that there was no longer any possibility of retraction for him. Of course he did not wish to retract. The one great longing of his life was to call Lily Dale his own. But he felt afraid of the squire,—that the squire would despise him and snub him, and that the earl would perceive that he had made a mistake when he saw how his client was scorned and snubbed. It was arranged that the earl was to take the squire into his own room for a few minutes before dinner, and Johnny felt that he would be hardly able to stand his ground in the drawing-room when the two old men should make their appearance together.

He got on very well with Lady Julia, who gave herself no airs, and made herself very civil. Her brother had told her the whole story, and she felt as anxious as he did to provide Lily with another husband in place of that horrible man Crosbie. "She has been very fortunate in her escape," she said to her brother; "very fortunate." The earl agreed with this, saying that in

his opinion his own favourite Johnny would make much the nicer lover of the two. Lady Julia had her doubts as to Lily's acquiescence. "But, Theodore, he must not speak to Miss Lilian Dale herself about it yet awhile."

"No," said the earl; "not for a month or so."

"He will have a better chance if he can remain silent for six months," said Lady Julia.

"Bless my soul! somebody else will have picked her up before that," said the earl.

In answer to this Lady Julia merely shook her head.

Johnny went over to his mother on Christmas Day after church, and was received by her and by his sister with great honour. And she gave him many injunctions as to his behaviour at the earl's table, even descending to small details about his boots and linen. But Johnny had already begun to feel at the Manor that, after all, people are not so very different in their ways of life as they are supposed to be. Lady Julia's manners were certainly not quite those of Mrs. Roper; but she made the tea very much in the way in which it was made at Burton Crescent, and Eames found that he could eat his egg, at any rate on the second morning, without any tremor in his hand, in spite of the coronet on the silver egg-cup. He did feel himself to be rather out of his place in the Manor pew on the Sunday, conceiving that all the congregation was looking at him; but he got over this on Christmas Day, and sat quite comfortably in his soft corner during the sermon, almost going to sleep. And when he walked with the earl after church to the gate over which the noble peer had climbed in his agony, and inspected the hedge through which he had thrown himself, he was

quite at home with his little jokes, bantering his august companion as to the mode of his somersault. But be it always remembered that there are two modes in which a young man may be free and easy with his elder and superior,—the mode pleasant and the mode offensive. Had it been in Johnny's nature to try the latter, the earl's back would soon have been up, and the play would have been over. But it was not in Johnny's nature to do so, and therefore it was that the earl liked him.

At last came the hour of dinner on Tuesday, or at least the hour at which the squire had been asked to show himself at the Manor House. Eames, as by agreement with his patron, did not come down so as to show himself till after the interview. Lady Julia, who had been present at their discussions, had agreed to receive the squire; and then a servant was to ask him to step into the earl's own room. It was pretty to see the way in which the three conspired together, planning and plotting with an eagerness that was beautifully green and fresh.

"He can be as cross as an old stick when he likes it," said the earl, speaking of the squire; "and we must take care not to rub him the wrong way."

"I shan't know what to say to him when I come down," said Johnny.

"Just shake hands with him and don't say anything," said Lady Julia.

"I 'll give him some port wine that ought to soften his heart," said the earl, "and then we 'll see how he is in the evening."

Eames heard the wheels of the squire's little open carriage and trembled. The squire, unconscious of all

schemes, soon found himself with Lady Julia, and within two minutes of his entrance was walked off to the earl's private room. "Certainly," he said, "certainly;" and followed the man-servant. The earl, as he entered, was standing in the middle of the room, and his round rosy face was a picture of good-humour.

"I 'm very glad you 've come, Dale," said he. "I 've something I want to say to you."

Mr. Dale, who neither in heart nor in manner was so light a man as the earl, took the proffered hand of his host, and bowed his head slightly, signifying that he was willing to listen to anything.

"I think I told you," continued the earl, "that young John Eames is down here; but he goes back to-morrow, as they can't spare him at his office. He 's a very good fellow,—as far as I am able to judge, an uncommonly good young man. I 've taken a great fancy to him myself."

In answer to this Mr. Dale did not say much. He sat down, and in some general terms expressed his good-will towards all the Eames family.

"As you know, Dale, I 'm a very bad hand at talking, and therefore I won't beat about the bush in what I 've got to say at present. Of course we 've all heard of that scoundrel Crosbie, and the way he has treated your niece Lilian."

"He is a scoundrel,—an unmixed scoundrel. But the less we say about that the better. It is ill mentioning a girl's name in such a matter as that."

"But, my dear Dale, I must mention it at the present moment. Dear young child, I would do anything to comfort her! And I hope that something may be

done to comfort her. Do you know that that young man was in love with her long before Crosbie ever saw her?"

"What;—John Eames!"

"Yes, John Eames. And I wish heartily for his sake that he had won her regard before she had met that rascal whom you had to stay down at your house."

"A man cannot help these things, De Guest," said the squire.

"No, no, no! There are such men about the world, and it is impossible to know them at a glance. He was my nephew's friend, and I am not going to say that my nephew was in fault. But I wish,—I only say that I wish,—she had first known what are this young man's feelings towards her."

"But she might not have thought of him as you do."

"He is an uncommonly good-looking young fellow; straight made, broad in the chest, with a good, honest eye, and a young man's proper courage. He has never been taught to give himself airs like a dancing monkey; but I think he 's all the better for that."

"But it 's too late now, De Guest."

"No, no; that 's just where it is. It must n't be too late! That child is not to lose her whole life because a villain has played her false. Of course she 'll suffer. Just at present it would n't do, I suppose, to talk to her about a new sweetheart. But, Dale, the time will come; the time will come;—the time always does come."

"It has never come to you and me," said the squire, with the slightest possible smile on his dry cheeks. The story of their lives had been so far the same; each had

loved, and each had been disappointed, and then each had remained single through life.

"Yes, it has," said the earl, with no slight touch of feeling and even of romance in what he said. "We have retricked our beams in our own ways, and our lives have not been desolate. But for her,—you and her mother will look forward to see her married some day."

"I have not thought about it."

"But I want you to think about it. I want to interest you in this fellow's favour; and in doing so, I mean to be very open with you. I suppose you 'll give her something?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure," said the squire, almost offended at an inquiry of such a nature.

"Well, then, whether you do or not, I 'll give him something," said the earl. "I should n't have ventured to meddle in the matter had I not intended to put myself in such a position with reference to him as would justify me in asking the question." And the peer as he spoke drew himself up to his full height. "If such a match can be made, it shall not be a bad marriage for your niece in a pecuniary point of view. I shall have pleasure in giving to him; but I shall have more pleasure if she can share what I give."

"She ought to be very much obliged to you," said the squire.

"I think she would be if she knew young Eames. I hope the day may come when she will be so. I hope that you and I may see them happy together, and that you too may thank me for having assisted in making them so. Shall we go in to Lady Julia now?" The earl had felt that he had not quite succeeded;

that his offer had been accepted somewhat coldly, and had not much hope that further good could be done on that day, even with the help of his best port wine.

"Half a moment," said the squire. "There are matters as to which I never find myself able to speak quickly, and this certainly seems to be one of them. If you will allow me I will think over what you have said, and then see you again."

"Certainly, certainly."

"But for your own part in the matter, for your great generosity and kind heart, I beg to offer you my warmest thanks." Then the squire bowed low, and preceded the earl out of the room.

Lord De Guest still felt that he had not succeeded. We may probably say, looking at the squire's character and peculiarities, that no marked success was probable at the first opening-out of such a subject. He had said to himself that he was never able to speak quickly in matters of moment; but he would more correctly have described his own character had he declared that he could not think of them quickly. As it was, the earl was disappointed; but had he been able to read the squire's mind, his disappointment would have been less strong. Mr. Dale knew well enough that he was being treated well, and that the effort being made was intended with kindness to those belonging to him; but it was not in his nature to be demonstrative and quick at expressions of gratitude. So he entered the drawing-room with a cold, placid face, leading Eames, and Lady Julia also, to suppose that no good had been done.

"How do you do, sir?" said Johnny, walking up to

him in a wild sort of manner,—going through a premeditated lesson, but doing it without any presence of mind.

"How do you do, Eames?" said the squire, speaking with a very cold voice. And then there was nothing further said till the dinner was announced.

"Dale, I know you drink port," said the earl when Lady Julia left them. "If you say you don't like that, I shall say you know nothing about it."

"Ah! that 's the '20," said the squire, tasting it.

"I should rather think it is," said the earl. "I was lucky enough to get it early, and it has n't been moved for thirty years. I like to give it to a man who knows it, as you do, at the first glance. Now there 's my friend Johnny, there; it 's thrown away upon him."

"No, my lord, it is not. I think it 's uncommonly nice."

"Uncommonly nice! So is champagne, or ginger-beer, or lollipops, for those who like them. Do you mean to tell me you can taste wine with half a pickled orange in your mouth?"

"It 'll come to him soon enough," said the squire.

"Twenty port won't come to him when he is as old as we are," said the earl, forgetting that by that time sixty port will be as wonderful to the then living seniors of the age as was his own pet vintage to him.

The good wine did in some sort soften the squire; but, as a matter of course, nothing further was said as to the new matrimonial scheme. The earl did observe, however, that Mr. Dale was civil, and even kind, to his own young friend, asking a question here and there as to his life in London, and saying something about the work at the Income-tax Office.

"It is hard work," said Eames. "If you 're under the line, they make a great row about it, send for you, and look at you as though you 'd been robbing the bank; but they think nothing of keeping you till five."

"But how long do you have for lunch and reading the papers?" said the earl.

"Not ten minutes. We take a paper among twenty of us for half the day. That 's exactly nine minutes to each; and as for lunch, we only have a biscuit dipped in ink."

"Dipped in ink!" said the squire.

"It comes to that, for you have to be writing while you munch it."

"I hear all about you," said the earl; "Sir Raffle Buffle is a crony of mine."

"I don't suppose he ever heard my name as yet," said Johnny. "But do you really know him well, Lord De Guest?"

"Have n't seen him these thirty years; but I did know him."

"We call him old Huffle Scuffle."

"Huffle Scuffle! Ha, ha, ha! He always was Huffle Scuffle; a noisy, pretentious, empty-headed fellow. But I ought n't to say so before you, young man. Come, we 'll go into the drawing-room."

"And what did he say?" asked Lady Julia, as soon as the squire was gone.

There was no attempt at concealment, and the question was asked in Johnny's presence.

"Well, he did not say much. And coming from him, that ought to be taken as a good sign. He is to think of it, and let me see him again. You hold your head up, Johnny, and remember that you shan't want

a friend on your side. Faint heart never won fair lady."

At seven o'clock on the following morning Eames started on his return journey, and was at his desk at twelve o'clock,—as per agreement with his taskmaster at the Income-tax Office.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMBAT.

I HAVE said that John Eames was at his office punctually at twelve; but an incident had happened before his arrival there very important in the annals which are now being told,—so important that it is essentially necessary that it should be described with some minuteness of detail.

Lord De Guest, in the various conversations which he had had with Eames as to Lily Dale and her present position, had always spoken of Crosbie with the most vehement abhorrence. "He is a damned blackguard," said the earl, and the fire had come out of his round eyes as he spoke. Now the earl was by no means given to cursing and swearing, in the sense which is ordinarily applied to these words. When he made use of such a phrase as that quoted above, it was to be presumed that he in some sort meant what he said; and so he did, and had intended to signify that Crosbie by his conduct had merited all such condemnation as was the fitting punishment for blackguardism of the worst description.

"He ought to have his neck broken," said Johnny.

"I don't know about that," said the earl. "The present times have become so pretty behaved that corporal punishment seems to have gone out of fashion.

I should n't care so much about that, if any other punishment had taken its place. But it seems to me that a blackguard such as Crosbie can escape now altogether unscathed."

"He has n't escaped yet," said Johnny.

"Don't you go and put your finger in the pie and make a fool of yourself," said the earl. If it had behoved any one to resent in any violent fashion the evil done by Crosbie, Bernard Dale, the earl's nephew, should have been the avenger. This the earl felt, but under these circumstances he was disposed to think that there should be no such violent vengeance. "Things were different when I was young," he said to himself. But Eames gathered from the earl's tone that the earl's words were not strictly in accordance with his thoughts, and he declared to himself over and over again that Crosbie had not yet escaped.

He got into the train at Guestwick, taking a first-class ticket, because the earl's groom in livery was in attendance upon him. Had he been alone he would have gone in a cheaper carriage. Very weak in him, was it not? little also, and mean? My friend, can you say that you would not have done the same at his age? Are you quite sure that you would not do the same now that you are double his age? Be that as it may, Johnny Eames did that foolish thing, and gave the groom in livery half-a-crown into the bargain.

"We shall have you down again soon, Mr. John," said the groom, who seemed to understand that Mr. Eames was to be made quite at home at the manor.

He went fast to sleep in the carriage, and did not awake till the train was stopped at the Barchester Junction.

"Waiting for the up-train from Barchester, sir," said the guard. "They 're always late." Then he went to sleep again, and was aroused in a few minutes by some one entering the carriage in a great hurry. The branch train had come in, just as the guardians of the line then present had made up their minds that the passengers on the main line should not be kept waiting any longer. The transfer of men, women, and luggage was therefore made in great haste, and they who were now taking their new seats had hardly time to look about them. An old gentleman, very red about the gills, first came into Johnny's carriage, which up to that moment he had shared with an old lady. The old gentleman was abusing everybody, because he was hurried, and would not take himself well into the compartment, but stuck in the doorway, standing on the step.

"Now, sir, when you 're quite at leisure," said a voice behind the old man, which instantly made Eames start up in his seat.

"I am not at all at leisure," said the old man; "and I 'm not going to break my legs if I know it."

"Take your time, sir," said the guard.

"So I mean," said the old man, seating himself in the corner nearest to the open door, opposite to the old lady. Then Eames saw plainly that it was Crosbie who had first spoken, and that he was getting into the carriage.

Crosbie at the first glance saw no one but the old gentleman and the old lady, and he immediately made for the unoccupied corner seat. He was busy with his umbrella and his dressing-bag, and a little flustered by the pushing and hurrying. The carriage was act-

ually in motion before he perceived that John Eames was opposite to him: Eames had, instinctively, drawn up his legs so as not to touch him. He felt that he had become very red in the face, and to tell the truth, the perspiration had broken out upon his brow. It was a great occasion,—great in its imminent trouble, and great in its opportunity for action. How was he to carry himself at the first moment of his recognition by his enemy, and what was he to do afterwards?

It need hardly be explained that Crosbie had also been spending his Christmas with a certain earl of his acquaintance, and that he too was returning to his office. In one respect he had been much more fortunate than poor Eames, for he had been made happy with the smiles of his lady-love. Alexandrina and the countess had fluttered about him softly, treating him as a tame chattel, now belonging to the noble house of De Courcy, and in this way he had been initiated into the inner domesticities of that illustrious family. The two extra men-servants, hired to wait upon Lady Dumbello, had vanished. The champagne had ceased to flow in a perennial stream. Lady Rosina had come out from her solitude and had preached at him constantly. Lady Margaretta had given him some lessons in economy. The Honourable John, in spite of a late quarrel, had borrowed five pounds from him. The Honourable George had engaged to come and stay with his sister during the next May. The earl had used a father-in-law's privilege, and had called him a fool. Lady Alexandrina had told him more than once, in rather a tart voice, that this must be done, and that that must be done; and the countess had given him her orders as though it was his duty, in the course of

nature, to obey every word that fell from her. Such had been his Christmas delights; and now, as he returned back from the enjoyment of them, he found himself confronted in the railway carriage with Johnny Eames!

The eyes of the two met, and Crosbie made a slight inclination of his head. To this Eames gave no acknowledgment whatever, but looked straight into the other's face. Crosbie immediately saw that they were not to know each other, and was well contented that it should be so. Among all his many troubles, the enmity of John Eames did not go for much. He showed no appearance of being disconcerted, though our friend had shown much. He opened his bag, and taking out a book was soon deeply engaged in it, pursuing his studies as though the man opposite was quite unknown to him. I will not say that his mind did not run away from his book, for indeed there were many things of which he found it impossible not to think; but it did not revert to John Eames. Indeed, when the carriages reached Paddington, he had in truth all but forgotten him; and as he stepped out of the carriage, with his bag in his hand, was quite free from any remotest trouble on his account.

But it had not been so with Eames himself. Every moment of the journey had for him been crowded with thought as to what he would do now that chance had brought his enemy within his reach. He had been made quite wretched by the intensity of his thinking; and yet, when the carriages stopped, he had not made up his mind. His face had been covered with perspiration ever since Crosbie had come across him, and his limbs had hardly been under his own command.

Here had come to him a great opportunity, and he felt so little confidence in himself that he almost knew that he would not use it properly. Twice and thrice he had almost flown at Crosbie's throat in the carriage, but he was restrained by an idea that the world and the police would be against him if he did such a thing in the presence of that old lady.

But when Crosbie turned his back upon him, and walked out, it was absolutely necessary that he should do something. He was not going to let the man escape, after all that he had said as to the expediency of thrashing him. Any other disgrace would be preferable to that. Fearing, therefore, lest his enemy should be too quick for him, he hurried out after him, and only just gave Crosbie time to turn round and face the carriages before he was upon him. "You confounded scoundrel!" he screamed out. "You confounded scoundrel!" and seized him by the throat, throwing himself upon him, and almost devouring him by the fury of his eyes.

The crowd upon the platform was not very dense, but there were quite enough of people to make a very respectable audience for this little play. Crosbie, in his dismay, retreated a step or two, and his retreat was much accelerated by the weight of Eames's attack. He endeavoured to free his throat from his foe's grasp; but in that he failed entirely. For the minute, however, he did manage to escape any positive blow, owing his safety in that respect rather to Eames's awkwardness than to his own efforts. Something about the police he was just able to utter, and there was, as a matter of course, an immediate call for a supply of those functionaries. In about three minutes three

policemen, assisted by six porters, had captured our poor friend Johnny; but this had not been done quick enough for Crosbie's purposes. The bystanders, taken by surprise, had allowed the combatants to fall back upon Mr. Smith's book-stall, and there Eames laid his foe prostrate among the newspapers, falling himself into the yellow shilling-novel depot by the over fury of his own energy; but as he fell, he contrived to lodge one blow with his fist in Crosbie's right eye,—one telling blow; and Crosbie had, to all intents and purposes, been thrashed.

"Con—founded scoundrel, rascal, blackguard!" shouted Johnny, with what remnants of voice were left to him, as the police dragged him off. "If you only knew—what he 's—done." But in the mean time the policemen held him fast.

As a matter of course the first burst of public sympathy went with Crosbie. He had been assaulted, and the assault had come from Eames. In the British bosom there is so firm a love of well-constituted order, that these facts alone were sufficient to bring twenty knights to the assistance of the three policemen and the six porters; so that for Eames, even had he desired it, there was no possible chance of escape. But he did not desire it. One only sorrow consumed him at present. He had, as he felt, attacked Crosbie, but had attacked him in vain. He had had his opportunity, and had misused it. He was perfectly unconscious of that happy blow, and was in absolute ignorance of the great fact that his enemy's eye was already swollen and closed, and that in another hour it would be as black as his hat.

"He is a con—founded rascal!" ejaculated Eames,

as the policeman and porters hauled him about. "You don't know what he 's done."

"No, we don't," said the senior constable; "but we know what you have done. I say, Bushers, where 's that gentleman? He 'd better come along with us."

Crosbie had been picked up from among the newspapers by another policeman and two or three other porters, and was attended also by the guard of the train, who knew him, and knew that he had come up from Courcy Castle. Three or four hangers-on were standing also around him, together with a benevolent medical man who was proposing to him an immediate application of leeches. If he could have done as he wished, he would have gone his way quietly, allowing Eames to do the same. A great evil had befallen him, but he could in no way mitigate that evil by taking the law of the man who had attacked him. To have the thing as little talked about as possible should be his endeavour. What though he should have Eames locked up and fined, and scolded by a police magistrate? That would not in any degree lessen his calamity. If he could have parried the attack, and got the better of his foe; if he could have administered the black eye instead of receiving it, then indeed he could have laughed the matter off at his club, and his original crime would have been somewhat glozed over by his success in arms. But such good fortune had not been his. He was forced, however, on the moment to decide as to what he would do.

"We 've got him here in custody, sir," said Bushers, touching his hat. It had become known from the guard that Crosbie was somewhat of a big man, a fre-

quent guest at Courcy Castle, and of repute and station in the higher regions of the Metropolitan world. "The magistrates will be sitting at Paddington now, sir—or will be by the time we get there."

By this time some mighty railway authority had come upon the scene and made himself cognisant of the facts of the row,—a stern official who seemed to carry the weight of many engines on his brow; one at the very sight of whom smokers would drop their cigars, and porters close their fists against sixpences; a great man with an erect chin, a quick step, and a well-brushed hat powerful with an elaborately upturned brim. This was the platform-superintendent, dominant even over the policemen.

"Step into my room, Mr. Crosbie," he said. "Stubbs, bring that man in with you." And then, before Crosbie had been able to make up his mind as to any other line of conduct, he found himself in the superintendent's room, accompanied by the guard, and by the two policemen who conducted Johnny Eames between them.

"What 's all this?" said the superintendent, still keeping on his hat, for he was aware how much of the excellence of his personal dignity was owing to the arrangement of that article; and as he spoke he frowned upon the culprit with his utmost severity. "Mr. Crosbie, I am very sorry that you should have been exposed to such brutality on our platform."

"You don't know what he has done," said Johnny. "He is the most confounded scoundrel living. He has broken——" But then he stopped himself. He was going to tell the superintendent that the confounded scoundrel had broken a beautiful young lady's heart;

but he bethought himself that he would not allude more specially to Lily Dale in that hearing.

"Do you know who he is, Mr. Crosbie?" said the superintendent.

"Oh, yes," said Crosbie, whose eye was already becoming blue. "He is a clerk in the Income-tax Office, and his name is Eames. I believe you had better leave him to me."

But the superintendent at once wrote down the words "Income-tax Office—Eames," on his tablet. "We can't allow a row like that to take place on our platform and not notice it. I shall bring it before the directors. It 's a most disgraceful affair, Mr. Eames —most disgraceful."

But Johnny by this time had perceived that Crosbie's eye was in a state which proved satisfactorily that his morning's work had not been thrown away, and his spirits were rising accordingly. He did not care two straws for the superintendent or even for the policemen, if only the story could be made to tell well for himself hereafter. It was his object to have thrashed Crosbie, and now, as he looked at his enemy's face, he acknowledged that Providence had been good to him.

"That 's your opinion," said Johnny.

"Yes, sir, it is," said the superintendent; "and I shall know how to represent the matter to your superiors, young man."

"You don't know all about it," said Eames; "and I don't suppose you ever will. I had made up my mind what I 'd do the first time I saw that scoundrel there; and now I 've done it. He 'd have got much worse in the railway carriage, only there was a lady there."

"Mr. Crosbie, I really think we had better take him before the magistrates."

To this, however, Crosbie objected. He assured the superintendent that he would himself know how to deal with the matter—which, however, was exactly what he did not know. Would the superintendent allow one of the railway servants to get a cab for him, and to find his luggage? He was very anxious to get home without being subjected to any more of Mr. Eames's insolence.

"You have n't done with Mr. Eames's insolence yet, I can tell you. All London shall hear of it, and shall know why. If you have any shame in you, you shall be ashamed to show your face."

Unfortunate man! Who can say that punishment —adequate punishment—had not overtaken him? For the present, he had to sneak home with a black eye, with the knowledge inside him that he had been whipped by a clerk in the Income-tax Office; and for the future—he was bound over to marry Lady Alexandrina De Courcy!

He got himself smuggled off in a cab, without being forced to go again upon the platform—his luggage being brought to him by two assiduous porters. But in all this there was very little balm for his hurt pride. As he ordered the cabman to drive to Mount Street, he felt that he had ruined himself by that step in life which he had taken at Courcy Castle. Whichever way he looked he had no comfort. "D—— the fellow!" he said, almost out loud in the cab; but though he did with his outward voice allude to Eames, the curse in his inner thoughts was uttered against himself.

Johnny was allowed to make his way down to the

platform, and there find his own carpet-bag. One young porter, however, came up and fraternised with him.

"You guve it him tidy just at that last moment, sir. But, laws, sir, you should have let out at him at fust. What 's the use of clawing a man's neck-collar?"

It was then a quarter past eleven, but, nevertheless, Eames appeared at his office precisely at twelve.

CHAPTER XV.

"VÆ VICTIS."

Crosbie had two engagements for that day; one being his natural engagement to do his work at his office, and the other an engagement, which was now very often becoming as natural, to dine at St. John's Wood with Lady Amelia Gagebee. It was manifest to him when he looked at himself in the glass that he could keep neither of these engagements. "Oh, laws, Mr. Crosbie," the woman of the house exclaimed when she saw him.

"Yes, I know," said he. "I 've had an accident and got a black eye. What 's a good thing for it?"

"Oh! an accident!" said the woman, who knew well that that mark had been made by another man's fist. "They do say that a bit of raw beef is about the best thing. But then it must be held on constant all the morning."

Anything would be better than leeches, which tell long-enduring tales, and therefore Crosbie sat through the greater part of the morning holding the raw beef to his eye. But it was necessary that he should write two notes as he held it, one to Mr. Butterwell at his office, and the other to his future sister-in-law. He felt that it would hardly be wise to attempt any entire concealment of the nature of his catastrophe, as some

of the circumstances would assuredly become known. If he said that he had fallen over the coal-scuttle, or on to the fender, thereby cutting his face, people would learn that he had fibbed, and would learn also that he had had some reason for fibbing. Therefore he constructed his notes with a phraseology that bound him to no details. To Butterwell he said that he had had an accident—or rather a row—and that he had come out of it with considerable damage to his frontispiece. He intended to be at the office on the next day, whether able to appear decently there or not. But for the sake of decency he thought it well to give himself that one half-day's chance. Then to the Lady Amelia he also said that he had had an accident, and had been a little hurt. "It is nothing at all serious, and affects only my appearance, so that I had better remain in for a day. I shall certainly be with you on Sunday. Don't let Gagebee trouble himself to come to me, as I shan't be at home after to-day." Gagebee did trouble himself to come to Mount Street so often, and South Audley Street, in which was Mr. Gagebee's office, was so disagreeably near to Mount Street, that Crosbie inserted this in order to protect himself if possible. Then he gave special orders that he was to be at home to no one, fearing that Gagebee would call for him after the hours of business—to make him safe and carry him off bodily to St. John's Wood.

The beefsteak and the dose of physic and the cold-water application which was kept upon it all night was not efficacious in dispelling that horrid, black-blue colour by ten o'clock on the following morning.

"It certainly have gone down, Mr. Crosbie; it certainly have," said the mistress of the lodgings, touch-

ing the part affected with her finger. "But the black won't go out of them all in a minute; it won't indeed. Could n't you just stay in one more day?"

"But will one day do it, Mrs. Phillips?"

Mrs. Phillips could n't take upon herself to say that it would. "They mostly come with little red streaks across the black before they goes away," said Mrs. Phillips, who would seem to have been the wife of a prize-fighter, so well was she acquainted with black eyes.

"And that won't be till to-morrow," said Crosbie, affecting to be mirthful in his agony.

"Not till the third day;—and then they wears themselves out, gradual. I never knew leeches do any good."

He stayed at home the second day, and then resolved that he would go to his office, black eye and all. In that morning's newspaper he saw an account of the whole transaction, saying how Mr. C—— of the Office of General Committees, who was soon about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful daughter of the Earl De C——, had been made the subject of a brutal personal attack on the platform of the Great Western Railway Station, and how he was confined to his room from the injuries which he had received. The paragraph went on to state that the delinquent had, as it was believed, dared to raise his eyes to the same lady, and that his audacity had been treated with scorn by every member of the noble family in question. "It was, however, satisfactory to know," so said the newspaper, "that Mr. C—— had amply avenged himself, and had so flogged the young man in question, that he had been unable to stir from his bed since the occurrence."

On reading this Crosbie felt that it would be better

that he should show himself at once, and tell as much of the truth as the world would be likely to ascertain at last without his telling. So on that third morning he put on his hat and gloves, and had himself taken to his office, though the red-streaky period of his misfortune had hardly even yet come upon him. The task of walking along the office passage, through the messengers' lobby, and into his room, was very disagreeable. Of course everybody looked at him, and of course he failed in his attempt to appear as though he did not mind it. "Boggs," he said to one of the men as he passed by, "just see if Mr. Butterwell is in his room," and then, as he expected, Mr. Butterwell came to him after the expiration of a few minutes.

"Upon my word, that is serious," said Mr. Butterwell, looking into the secretary's damaged face. "I don't think I would have come out if I had been you."

"Of course it 's disagreeable," said Crosbie; "but it 's better to put up with it. Fellows do tell such horrid lies if a man is n't seen for a day or two. I believe it 's best to put a good face upon it."

"That 's more than you can do just at present, eh, Crosbie?" And then Mr. Butterwell tittered. "But how on earth did it happen? The paper says that you pretty well killed the fellow who did it."

"The paper lies, as papers always do. I did n't touch him at all."

"Did n't you, though? I should like to have had a poke at him after getting such a tap in the face as that."

"The policemen came, and all that sort of thing. One is n't allowed to fight it out in a row of that kind as one would have to do on Salisbury Heath. Not

that I mean to say that I could lick the fellow. How 's a man to know whether he can or not?"

"How, indeed, unless he gets a licking,—or gives it? But who was he, and what 's this about his having been scorned by the noble family?"

"Trash and lies, of course. He had never seen any of the De Courcy people."

"I suppose the truth is, it was about that other—eh, Crosbie? I knew you 'd find yourself in some trouble before you 'd done."

"I don't know what it was about, or why he should have made such a brute of himself. You have heard about those people at Allington?"

"Oh, yes; I have heard about them."

"God knows, I did n't mean to say anything against them. They knew nothing about it."

"But the young fellow knew them? Ah, yes, I see all about it. He wants to step into your shoes. I can't say that he sets about it in a bad way. But what do you mean to do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! Won't that look queer? I think I should have him before the magistrates."

"You see, Butterwell, I am bound to spare that girl's name. I know I have behaved badly."

"Well, yes; I fear you have."

Mr. Butterwell said this with some considerable amount of decision in his voice, as though he did not intend to mince matters, or in any way to hide his opinion. Crosbie had got into a way of condemning himself in this matter of his marriage, but was very anxious that others, on hearing such condemnation from him, should say something in the way of palliat-

ing his fault. It would be so easy for a friend to remark that such little peccadilloes were not altogether uncommon, and that it would sometimes happen in life that people did not know their own minds. He had hoped for some such benevolence from Fowler Pratt, but had hoped in vain. Butterwell was a good-natured, easy man, anxious to stand well with all about him, never pretending to any very high tone of feeling or of morals; and yet Butterwell would say no word of comfort to him. He could get no one to slur over his sin for him, as though it were no sin,—only an unfortunate mistake; no one but the De Courcys, who had, as it were, taken possession of him and swallowed him alive.

"It can't be helped now," said Crosbie. "But as for that fellow who made such a brutal attack on me the other morning, he knows that he is safe behind her petticoats. I can do nothing which would not make some mention of her name necessary."

"Ah, yes; I see," said Butterwell. "It 's very unfortunate; very. I don't know that I can do anything for you. Will you come before the Board today?"

"Yes; of course I shall," said Crosbie, who was becoming very sore. His sharp ear had told him that all Butterwell's respect and cordiality were gone,—at any rate for the time. Butterwell, though holding the higher official rank, had always been accustomed to treat him as though he, the inferior, were to be courted. He had possessed, and had known himself to possess, in his office as well as in the outside world, a sort of rank much higher than that which from his position he could claim legitimately. Now he was being deposed.

There could be no better touchstone in such a matter than Butterwell. He would go as the world went, but he would perceive almost intuitively how the world intended to go. "Tact, tact, tact," as he was in the habit of saying to himself when walking along the paths of his Putney villa. Crosbie was now secretary, whereas a few months before he had been simply a clerk; but, nevertheless, Mr. Butterwell's instinct told him that Crosbie had fallen. Therefore he declined to offer any sympathy to the man in his misfortune, and felt aware, as he left the secretary's room, that it might probably be some time before he visited it again.

Crosbie resolved in his soreness that henceforth he would brazen it out. He would go to the Board, with as much indifference as to his black eye as he was able to assume, and if any one said aught to him he would be ready with his answer. He would go to his club, and let him who intended to show him any slight beware of his wrath. He could not turn upon John Eames, but he could turn upon others if it were necessary. He had not gained for himself a position before the world, and held it now for some years, to allow himself to be crushed at once because he had made a mistake. If the world, his world, chose to go to war with him, he would be ready for the fight. As for Butterwell,—Butterwell the incompetent, Butterwell the vapid,—for Butterwell, who in every little official difficulty had for years past come to him, he would let Butterwell know what it was to be thus disloyal to one who had condescended to be his friend. He would show them all at the Board that he scorned them, and could be their master. Then, too, as he

was making some other resolves as to his future conduct, he made one or two resolutions respecting the De Courcy people. He would make it known to them that he was not going to be their very humble servant. He would speak out his mind with considerable plainness; and if upon that they should choose to break off this "alliance," they might do so; he would not break his heart. And as he leaned back in his arm-chair, thinking of all this, an idea made its way into his brain,—a floating castle in the air, rather than the image of a thing that might by possibility be realised; and in this castle in the air he saw himself kneeling again at Lily's feet, asking her pardon, and begging that he might once more be taken to her heart.

"Mr. Crosbie is here to-day," said Mr. Butterwell to Mr. Optimist.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Optimist, very gravely; for he had heard all about the row at the railway station.

"They 've made a monstrous show of him."

"I am very sorry to hear it. It 's so—so—so—— If it were one of the younger clerks, you know, we should tell him that it was discreditable to the department."

"If a man gets a blow in the eye, he can't help it, you know. He did n't do it himself, I suppose," said Major Fiasco.

"I am well aware that he did n't do it himself," continued Mr. Optimist; "but I really think that, in his position, he should have kept himself out of any such encounter."

"He would have done so if he could, with all his heart," said the major. "I don't suppose he liked being thrashed any better than I should."

"Nobody gives me a black eye," said Mr. Optimist.

"Nobody has as yet," said the major.

"I hope they never will," said Mr. Butterwell. Then, the hour for their meeting having come round, Mr. Crosbie came into the Board-room.

"We have been very sorry to hear of this misfortune," said Mr. Optimist, very gravely.

"Not half so sorry as I have been," said Crosbie, with a laugh. "It 's an uncommon nuisance to have a black eye, and to go about looking like a prize-fighter."

"And like a prize-fighter that did n't win his battle too," said Fiasco.

"I don't know that there 's much difference as to that," said Crosbie. "But the whole thing is a nuisance, and if you please, we won't say anything more about it."

Mr. Optimist almost entertained an opinion that it was his duty to say something more about it. Was not he the chief Commissioner, and was not Mr. Crosbie secretary to the Board? Ought he, looking at their respective positions, to pass over without a word of notice such a manifest impropriety as this? Would not Sir Raffle Buffle have said something had Mr. Butterwell, when secretary, come to the office with a black eye? He wished to exercise all the full rights of a chairman; but, nevertheless, as he looked at the secretary he felt embarrassed, and was unable to find the proper words. "H—m, ha, well; we 'll go to business now, if you please," he said, as though reserving to himself the right of returning to the secretary's black eye when the more usual business of the Board should be completed. But when the more usual

business of the Board had been completed, the secretary left the room without any further reference to his eye.

Crosbie, when he got back to his own apartment, found Mortimer Gagebee waiting there for him.

"My dear fellow," said Gagebee, "this is a very nasty affair."

"Uncommonly nasty," said Crosbie; "so nasty that I don't mean to talk about it to anybody."

"Lady Amelia is quite unhappy." He always called her Lady Amelia, even when speaking of her to his own brothers and sisters. He was too well behaved to take the liberty of calling an earl's daughter by her plain Christian name, even though that earl's daughter was his own wife. "She fears that you have been a good deal hurt."

"Not at all hurt; but disfigured, as you see."

"And so you beat the fellow well that did it?"

"No, I did n't," said Crosbie, very angrily. "I did n't beat him at all. You don't believe everything you read in the newspapers, do you?"

"No, I don't believe everything. Of course I did n't believe about his having aspired to an alliance with the Lady Alexandrina. That was untrue, of course." Mr. Gagebee showed by the tone of his voice that impudence so unparalleled as that was quite incredible.

"You should n't believe anything; except this—that I have got a black eye."

"You certainly have got that. Lady Amelia thinks you would be more comfortable if you would come up to us this evening. You can't go out, of course; but Lady Amelia said, very good-naturedly, that you need not mind with her."

"Thank you, no; I 'll come on Sunday."

"Of course Lady Alexandrina will be very anxious to hear from her sister; and Lady Amelia begged me very particularly to press you to come."

"Thank you, no; not to-day."

"Why not?"

"Oh, simply because I shall be better at home."

"How can you be better at home? You can have anything that you want. Lady Amelia won't mind, you know."

Another beefsteak to his eye, as he sat in the drawing-room, a cold-water bandage, or any little medical appliance of that sort;—these were the things which Lady Amelia would in her domestic good nature condescend not to mind!

"I won't trouble her this evening," said Crosbie.

"Well, upon my word, I think you 're wrong. All manner of stories will get down to Courcy Castle, and to the countess's ears; and you don't know what harm may come of it. Lady Amelia thinks she had better write and explain it; but she can't do so till she has heard something about it from you."

"Look here, Gagebee. I don't care one straw what story finds its way down to Courcy Castle."

"But if the earl were to hear anything and be offended?"

"He may recover from his offence as he best likes."

"My dear fellow; that 's talking wildly, you know."

"What on earth do you suppose the earl can do to me? Do you think I 'm going to live in fear of Lord De Courcy all my life, because I 'm going to marry his daughter? I shall write to Alexandrina myself to-day, and you can tell her sister so. I 'll be up to din-

ner on Sunday, unless my face makes it altogether out of the question."

"And you won't come in time for church?"

"Would you have me go to church with such a face as this?"

Then Mr. Mortimer Gagebee went, and when he got home he told his wife that Crosbie was taking things with a high hand. "The fact is, my dear, that he 's ashamed of himself, and therefore tries to put a bold face upon it."

"It was very foolish of him throwing himself in the way of that young man,—very; and so I shall tell him on Sunday. If he chooses to give himself airs to me, I shall make him understand that he is very wrong. He should remember now that the way in which he conducts himself is a matter of moment to all our family."

"Of course he should," said Mr. Gagebee.

When the Sunday came the red-streaky period had arrived, but had by no means as yet passed away. The men at the office had almost become used to it; but Crosbie, in spite of his determination to go down to the club, had not yet shown himself elsewhere. Of course he did not go to church, but at five he made his appearance at the house in St. John's Wood. They always dined at five on Sundays, having some idea that by doing so they kept the Sabbath better than they would have done had they dined at seven. If keeping the Sabbath consists in going to bed early, or is in any way assisted by such a practice, they were right. To the cook that semi-early dinner might perhaps be convenient, as it gave her an excuse for not going to church in the afternoon, as the servants' and children's

dinner gave her a similar excuse in the morning. Such little attempts at goodness,—proceeding half the way, or perhaps, as in this instance, one quarter of the way, on the disagreeable path towards goodness,—are very common with respectable people, such as Lady Amelia. If she would have dined at one o'clock, and have eaten cold meat, one perhaps might have felt that she was entitled to some praise.

"Dear, dear, dear; this is very sad, is n't it, Adolphus?" she said on first seeing him.

"Well, it is sad, Amelia," he said. He always called her Amelia, because she called him Adolphus; but Gagebee himself was never quite pleased when he heard it. Lady Amelia was older than Crosbie, and entitled to call him anything she liked; but he should have remembered the great difference in their rank. "It is sad, Amelia," he said. "But will you oblige me in one thing?"

"What thing, Adolphus?"

"Not to say a word more about it. The black eye is a bad thing, no doubt, and has troubled me much; but the sympathy of my friends has troubled me a great deal more. I had all the family commiseration from Gagebee on Friday, and if it is repeated again, I shall lie down and die."

"Shall 'oo die, uncle Dolphus, 'cause 'oo 've got a bad eye?" asked De Courcy Gagebee, the eldest hope of the family, looking up into his face.

"No, my hero," said Crosbie, taking the boy up into his arms, "not because I 've got a black eye. There is n't very much harm in that, and you 'll have a great many before you leave school. But because the people will go on talking about it."

"But aunt Dina 'on't like 'oo, if 'oo 've got an ugly bad eye."

"But, Adolphus," said Lady Amelia, settling herself for an argument, "that 's all very well, you know—and I 'm sure I 'm very sorry to cause you any annoyance, —but really one does n't know how to pass over such a thing without speaking of it. I have had a letter from mamma."

"I hope Lady De Courcy is quite well."

"Quite well, thank you. But as a matter of course she is very anxious about this affair. She had read what has been said in the newspapers, and it may be necessary that Mortimer should take it up, as the family solicitor."

"Quite out of the question," said Adolphus.

"I don't think I should advise any such step as that," said Gagebee.

"Perhaps not; very likely not. But you cannot be surprised, Mortimer, that my mother under such circumstances should wish to know what are the facts of the case."

"Not at all surprised," said Gagebee.

"Then once for all, I 'll tell you the facts. As I got out of the train a man I 'd seen once before in my life made an attack upon me, and before the police came up, I got a blow in the face. Now you know all about it."

At that moment dinner was announced. "Will you give Lady Amelia your arm?" said the husband.

"It 's a very sad occurrence," said Lady Amelia, with a slight toss of her head, "and, I 'm afraid, will cost my sister a great deal of vexation."

"You agree with De Courcy, do you, that aunt Dina won't like me with an ugly black eye?"

"I really don't think it 's a joking matter," said the Lady Amelia. And then there was nothing more said about it during the dinner.

There was nothing more said about it during the dinner, but it was plain enough from Lady Amelia's countenance that she was not very well pleased with her future brother-in-law's conduct. She was very hospitable to him, pressing him to eat; but even in doing that she made repeated little references to his present unfortunate state. She told him that she did not think fried plum-pudding would be bad for him, but that she would recommend him not to drink port wine after dinner. "By-the-bye, Mortimer, you 'd better have some claret up," she remarked. "Adolphus should n't take anything that is heating."

"Thank you," said Crosbie. "I 'll have some brandy-and-water, if Gagebee will give it me."

"Brandy-and-water!" said Lady Amelia. Crosbie in truth was not given to the drinking of brandy-and-water; but he was prepared to call for raw gin, if he were driven much further by Lady Amelia's solicitude.

At these Sunday dinners the mistress of the house never went away into the drawing-room, and the tea was always brought in to them at the table on which they had dined. It was another little step towards keeping holy the first day of the week. When Lady Rosina was there, she was indulged with the sight of six or seven solid good books which were laid upon the mahogany as soon as the bottles were taken off it. At her first prolonged visit she had obtained for herself the privilege of reading a sermon; but as on such occasions both Lady Amelia and Mr. Gagebee would go to sleep,—and as the footman had also once shown a

tendency that way,—the sermon had been abandoned. But the master of the house, on these evenings, when his sister-in-law was present, was doomed to sit in idleness, or else to find solace in one of the solid good books. But Lady Rosina just now was in the country, and therefore the table was left unfurnished.

"And what am I to say to my mother?" said Lady Amelia, when they were alone.

"Give her my kindest regards," said Crosbie. It was quite clear, both to the husband and to the wife, that he was preparing himself for rebellion against authority.

For some ten minutes there was nothing said. Crosbie amused himself by playing with the boy whom he called Dicksey, by way of a nickname for De Courcy.

"Mamma, he calls me Dicksey. Am I Dicksey? I 'll call 'oo old Cross, and then aunt Dina 'on't like 'oo."

"I wish you would not call the child nicknames, Adolphus. It seems as though you would wish to cast a slur upon the one which he bears."

"I should hardly think that he would feel disposed to do that," said Mr. Gagebee.

"Hardly, indeed," said Crosbie.

"It has never yet been disgraced in the annals of our country by being made into a nickname," said the proud daughter of the house. She was probably unaware that among many of his associates her father had been called Lord De Curse'ye, from the occasional energy of his language. "And any such attempt is painful in my ears. I think something of my family, I can assure you, Adolphus, and so does my husband."

"A very great deal," said Mr. Gagebee.

"So do I of mine," said Crosbie. "That 's natural to all of us. One of my ancestors came over with William the Conqueror. I think he was one of the assistant cooks in the king's tent."

"A cook!" said young De Courcy.

"Yes, my boy, a cook. That was the way most of our old families were made noble. They were cooks, or butlers to the kings—or sometimes something worse."

"But your family is n't noble?"

"No—I 'll tell you how that was. The king wanted this cook to poison half-a-dozen of his officers who wished to have a way of their own; but the cook said, 'No, my Lord King; I am a cook, not an executioner.' So they sent him into the scullery, and when they called all the other servants barons and lords, they only called him Cookey. They 've changed the name to Crosbie since that, by degrees."

Mr. Gagebee was awestruck, and the face of the Lady Amelia became very dark. Was it not evident that this snake, when taken into their innermost bosoms that they might there warm him, was becoming an adder, and preparing to sting them? There was very little more conversation that evening, and soon after the story of the cook, Crosbie got up and went away to his own home.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SEE, THE CONQUERING HERO COMES."

JOHN EAMES had reached his office precisely at twelve o'clock, but when he did so he hardly knew whether he was standing on his heels or his head. The whole morning had been to him one of intense excitement, and latterly, to a certain extent, one of triumph. But he did not at all know what might be the results. Would he be taken before a magistrate and locked up? Would there be a row at the office? Would Crosbie call him out, and, if so, would it be incumbent on him to fight a duel with pistols? What would Lord De Guest say—Lord De Guest, who had specially warned him not to take upon himself the duty of avenging Lily's wrongs? What would all the Dale family say of his conduct? And, above all, what would Lily say and think? Nevertheless, the feeling of triumph was predominant; and now, at this interval of time, he was beginning to remember with pleasure the sensation of his fist as it went into Crosbie's eye.

During the first day at the office he heard nothing about the affair, nor did he say a word of it to any one. It was known in his room that he had gone down to spend his Christmas holiday with Lord De Guest, and he was treated with some increased consideration accordingly. And, moreover, I must explain, in order

that I may give Johnny Eames his due, he was gradually acquiring for himself a good footing among the income-tax officials. He knew his work, and did it with some manly confidence in his own powers, and also with some manly indifference to the occasional frowns of the mighty men of the department. He was, moreover, popular—being somewhat of a radical in his official demeanour, and holding by his own rights, even though mighty men should frown. In truth, he was emerging from his hobbledehoyhood and entering upon his young manhood, having probably to go through much folly and some false sentiment in that period of his existence, but still with fair promise of true manliness beyond, to those who were able to read the signs of his character.

Many questions on that first day were asked him about the glories of his Christmas, but he had very little to say on the subject. Indeed nothing could have been much more commonplace than his Christmas visit, had it not been for the one great object which had taken him down to that part of the country, and for the circumstance with which his holiday had been ended. On neither of these subjects was he disposed to speak openly; but as he walked home to Burton Crescent with Cradell, he did tell him of the affair with Crosbie.

"And you went in at him on the station?" asked Cradell, with admiring doubt.

"Yes, I did. If I did n't do it there, where was I to do it? I 'd said I would, and therefore when I saw him I did it." Then the whole affair was told as to the black eye, the police, and the superintendent. "And what 's to come next?" asked our hero.

"Well, he 'll put it in the hands of a friend, of course: as I did with Fisher in that affair with Lupex. And, upon my word, Johnny, I shall have to do something of the kind again. His conduct last night was outrageous; would you believe it——"

"Oh, he 's a fool."

"He 's a fool you would n't like to meet when he 's in one of his mad fits, I can tell you that. I absolutely had to sit up in my own bedroom all last night. Mother Roper told me that if I remained in the drawing-room she would feel herself obliged to have a policeman in the house. What could I do, you know? I made her have a fire for me, of course."

"And then you went to bed."

"I waited ever so long, because I thought that Maria would want to see me. At last she sent me a note. Maria is so imprudent, you know. If he had found anything in her writing, it would have been terrible, you know,—quite terrible. And who can say whether Jemima may n't tell?"

"And what did she say?"

"Come; that 's tellings, Master Johnny. I took very good care to take it with me to the office this morning, for fear of accidents."

But Eames was not so widely awake to the importance of his friend's adventures as he might have been had he not been weighted with adventures of his own.

"I should n't care so much," said he, "about that fellow Crosbie going to a friend, as I should about his going to a police magistrate."

"He 'll put it in a friend's hands, of course," said Cradell, with the air of a man who from experience was well up in such matters. "And I suppose you 'll

naturally come to me. It 's a deuced bore to a man in a public office, and all that kind of thing, of course. But I 'm not the man to desert my friend. I 'll stand by you, Johnny, my boy."

"Oh, thank you," said Eames, "I don't think that I shall want that."

"You must be ready with a friend, you know."

"I should write down to a man I know in the country, and ask his advice," said Eames; "an older sort of friend, you know."

"By Jove, old fellow, take care what you 're about. Don't let them say of you that you show the white feather. Upon my honour, I 'd sooner have anything said of me than that. I would, indeed,—anything."

"I 'm not afraid of that," said Eames, with a touch of scorn in his voice. "There is n't much thought about white feathers now-a-days,—not in the way of fighting duels."

After that Cradell managed to carry back the conversation to Mrs. Lupex and his own peculiar position, and as Eames did not care to ask from his companion further advice in his own matters, he listened nearly in silence till they reached Burton Crescent.

"I hope you found the noble earl well," said Mrs. Roper to him, as soon as they were all seated at dinner.

"I found the noble earl pretty well, thank you," said Johnny.

It had become plainly understood by all the Roperites that Eames's position was quite altered since he had been honoured with the friendship of Lord De Guest. Mrs. Lupex, next to whom he always sat at dinner, with a view to protecting her as it were from the dangerous neighbourhood of Cradell, treated him

with a marked courtesy. Miss Spruce always called him "sir." Mrs. Roper helped him the first of the gentlemen, and was mindful about his fat and gravy, and Amelia felt less able than she was before to insist upon the possession of his heart and affections. It must not be supposed that Amelia intended to abandon the fight, and allow the enemy to walk off with his forces; but she felt herself constrained to treat him with a deference that was hardly compatible with the perfect equality which should attend any union of hearts.

"It is such a privilege to be on visiting terms with the nobility," said Mrs. Lupex. "When I was a girl, I used to be on very intimate——"

"You ain't a girl any longer, and so you 'd better not talk about it," said Lupex. Mr. Lupex had been at that little shop in Drury Lane after he came down from his scene-painting.

"My dear, you need n't be a brute to me before all Mrs. Roper's company. If, led away by feelings which I will not now describe, I left my proper circles in marrying you, you need not before all the world teach me how much I have to regret." And Mrs. Lupex, putting down her knife and fork, applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

"That 's pleasant for a man over his meals, is n't it?" said Lupex, appealing to Miss Spruce. "I have plenty of that kind of thing, and you can't think how I like it."

"Them whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder," said Miss Spruce. "As for me myself, I 'm only an old woman."

This little ebullition threw a gloom over the dinner-

table, and nothing more was said on the occasion as to the glories of Eames's career. But, in the course of the evening, Amelia heard of the encounter which had taken place at the railway station, and at once perceived that she might use the occasion for her own purposes.

"John," she whispered to her victim, finding an opportunity for coming upon him when almost alone, "what is this I hear? I insist upon knowing. Are you going to fight a duel?"

"Nonsense," said Johnny.

"But it is not nonsense. You don't know what my feelings will be, if I think that such a thing is going to happen. But then you are so hard-hearted!"

"I ain't hard-hearted a bit, and I 'm not going to fight a duel."

"But is it true that you beat Mr. Crosbie at the station?"

"It is true. I did beat him."

"Oh, John! not that I mean to say you were wrong, and indeed I honour you for the feeling. There can be nothing so dreadful as a young man's deceiving a young woman and leaving her after he has won her heart,—particularly when she has had his promise in plain words, or, perhaps, even in black and white." John thought of that horrid, foolish, wretched note which he had written. "And a poor girl, if she can't right herself by a breach of promise, does n't know what to do. Does she, John?"

"A girl who 'd right herself that way would n't be worth having."

"I don't know about that. When a poor girl is in such a position, she has to be said by her friends. I

suppose, then, Miss Lily Dale won't bring a breach of promise against him."

This mention of Lily's name in such a place was sacrilege in the ears of poor Eames. "I cannot tell," said he, "what may be the intention of the lady of whom you speak. But from what I know of her friends, I should not think that she will be disgraced by such a proceeding."

"That may be all very well for Miss Lily Dale——" Amelia said, and then she hesitated. It would not be well, she thought, absolutely to threaten him as yet,—not as long as there was any possibility that he might be won without a threat. "Of course I know all about it," she continued. "She was your L. D., you know. Not that I was ever jealous of her. To you she was no more than one of childhood's friends. Was she, Johnny?"

He stamped his foot upon the floor, and then jumped up from his seat. "I hate all that sort of twaddle about childhood's friends, and you know I do. You 'll make me swear that I 'll never come into this room again."

"Johnny!"

"So I will. The whole thing makes me sick. And as for that Mrs. Lupex——"

"If this is what you learn, John, by going to a lord's house, I think you had better stay at home with your own friends."

"Of course I had;—much better stay at home with my own friends. Here 's Mrs. Lupex, and at any rate I can't stand her." So he went off, and walked round the Crescent, and down to the New Road, and almost into the Regent's Park, thinking of Lily Dale and of his own cowardice with Amelia Roper.

On the following morning he received a message, at about one o'clock, by the mouth of the Board-room messenger, informing him that his presence was required in the Board-room. "Sir Raffle Buffle has desired your presence, Mr. Eames."

"My presence, Tupper! what for?" said Johnny, turning upon the messenger almost with dismay.

"Indeed I can't say, Mr. Eames; but Sir Raffle Buffle has desired your presence in the Board-room."

Such a message as that in official life always strikes awe into the heart of a young man. And yet, young men generally come forth from such interviews without having received any serious damage, and generally talk about the old gentleman whom they have encountered with a good deal of light-spirited sarcasm,—or chaff, as it is called in the slang phraseology of the day. It is that same "majesty which doth hedge a king" that does it. The turkey-cock in his own farmyard is master of the occasion, and the thought of him creates fear. A bishop in his lawn, a judge on the bench, a chairman in the big room at the end of a long table, or a policeman with his bull's-eye lamp upon his beat, can all make themselves terrible by means of those appanages of majesty which have been vouchsafed to them. But how mean is the policeman in his own home, and how few thought much of Sir Raffle Buffle as he sat asleep after dinner in his old slippers! How well can I remember the terror created within me by the air of outraged dignity with which a certain fine old gentleman, now long since gone, could rub his hands slowly, one on the other, and look up to the ceiling, slightly shaking his head, as though lost in the contemplation of my iniquities! I would become sick

in my stomach, and feel as though my ankles had been broken. That upward turn of the eye unmanned me so completely that I was speechless as regarded any defence. I think that that old man could hardly have known the extent of his own power.

Once upon a time a careless lad, having the charge of a bundle of letters addressed to the King,—petitions and such like, which in the course of business would not get beyond the hands of some lord-in-waiting's deputy assistant,—sent the bag which contained them to the wrong place; to Windsor, perhaps, if the Court were in London; or to St. James's, if it were at Windsor. He was summoned; and the great man of the occasion contented himself with holding his hands up to the heavens as he stood up from his chair, and exclaiming twice, "Mis-sent the Monarch's pouch! Mis-sent the Monarch's pouch!" That young man never knew how he escaped from the Board-room; but for a time he was deprived of all power of exertion, and could not resume his work till he had had six months' leave of absence, and been brought round upon rum and asses' milk. In that instance the peculiar use of the word Monarch had a power which the official magnate had never contemplated. The story is traditional; but I believe that the circumstance happened as lately as in the days of George the Third.

John Eames could laugh at the present chairman of the Income-tax Office with great freedom, and call him old Huffle Scuffle, and the like; but now that he was sent for, he also, in spite of his radical propensities, felt a little weak about his ankle joints. He knew, from the first hearing of the message, that he was wanted with reference to that affair at the railway

station. Perhaps there might be a rule that any clerk should be dismissed who used his fists in any public place. There were many rules entailing the punishment of dismissal for many offences,—and he began to think that he did remember something of such a regulation. However, he got up, looked once around him upon his friends, and then followed Tupper into the Board-room.

"There 's Johnny been sent for by old Scuffles," said one clerk.

"That 's about his row with Crosbie," said another. "The Board can't do anything to him for that."

"Can't it?" said the first. "Did n't young Outonites have to resign because of that row at the Cider Cellars, though his cousin, Sir Constant Outonites, did all that he could for him?"

"But he was regularly up the spout with accommodation bills."

"I tell you that I would n't be in Eames's shoes for a trifle. Crosbie is secretary at the Committee Office, where Scuffles was chairman before he came here; and of course they 're as thick as thieves. I should n't wonder if they did n't make him go down and apologise."

"Johnny won't do that," said the other.

In the mean time John Eames was standing in the august presence. Sir Raffle Buffle was throned in his great oak arm-chair at the head of a long table in a very large room; and by him, at the corner of the table, was seated one of the assistant secretaries of the office. Another member of the Board was also at work upon the long table; but he was reading and signing papers at some distance from Sir Raffle, and

paid no heed whatever to the scene. The assistant secretary, looking on, could see that Sir Raffle was annoyed by this want of attention on the part of his colleague, but all this was lost upon Eames.

"Mr. Eames?" said Sir Raffle, speaking with a peculiarly harsh voice, and looking at the culprit through a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, which he perched for the occasion upon his big nose. "Is n't that Mr. Eames?"

"Yes," said the assistant secretary, "this is Eames."

"Ah!"—and then there was a pause. "Come a little nearer, Mr. Eames, will you?" and Johnny drew nearer, advancing noiselessly over the Turkey carpet.

"Let me see; in the second class, is n't he? Ah! Do you know, Mr. Eames, that I have received a letter from the secretary to the Directors of the Great Western Railway Company, detailing circumstances which,—if truly stated in that letter,—redound very much to your discredit?"

"I did get into a row there yesterday, sir."

"Got into a row! It seems to me that you have got into a very serious row, and that I must tell the Directors of the Great Western Railway Company that the law must be allowed to take its course."

"I shan't mind that, sir, in the least," said Eames, brightening up a little under this view of the case.

"Not mind that, sir!" said Sir Raffle—or rather, he shouted out the words at the offender before him. I am inclined to think that he overdid it, missing the effect which a milder tone might have attained. Perhaps there was lacking to him some of that majesty of demeanour and dramatic propriety of voice which had been so efficacious in the little story as to the King's

bag of letters. As it was, Johnny gave a slight jump, but after his jump he felt better than he had been before. "Not mind, sir, being dragged before the criminal tribunals of your country, and being punished as a felon,—or rather for a misdemeanour,—for an outrage committed on a public platform! Not mind it! What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, that I don't think the magistrate would say very much about it, sir. And I don't think Mr. Crosbie would come forward."

"But Mr. Crosbie must come forward, young man. Do you suppose that an outrage against the peace of the Metropolis is to go unpunished because he may not wish to pursue the matter? I 'm afraid you must be very ignorant, young man."

"Perhaps I am," said Johnny.

"Very ignorant indeed,—very ignorant indeed. And are you aware, sir, that it would become a question with the Commissioners of this Board whether you could be retained in the service of this department if you were publicly punished by a police magistrate for such a disgraceful outrage as that?"

Johnny looked round at the other Commissioner, but that gentleman did not raise his face from his papers.

"Mr. Eames is a very good clerk," whispered the assistant secretary, but in a voice which made his words audible to Eames; "one of the best young men we have," he added, in a voice which was not audible.

"Oh,—ah; very well. Now, I 'll tell you what, Mr. Eames, I hope this will be a lesson to you,—a very serious lesson."

The assistant secretary, leaning back in his chair so

as to be a little behind the head of Sir Raffle, did manage to catch the eye of the other Commissioner. The other Commissioner, barely looking round, smiled a little, and then the assistant secretary smiled also. Eames saw this and he smiled too.

"Whether any ulterior consequences may still await the breach of the peace of which you have been guilty, I am not yet prepared to say," continued Sir Raffle. "You may go now."

And Johnny returned to his own place, with no increased reverence for the dignity of the chairman.

On the following morning one of his colleagues showed him with great glee the passage in the newspaper which informed the world that he had been so desperately beaten by Crosbie that he was obliged to keep his bed at the present time in consequence of the flogging that he had received. Then his anger was aroused, and he bounced about the big room of the Income-tax Office, regardless of assistant secretaries, head clerks, and all other official grandees whatsoever, denouncing the iniquities of the public press, and declaring his opinion that it would be better to live in Russia than in a country which allowed such audacious falsehoods to be propagated.

"He never touched me, Fisher; I don't think he ever tried; but, upon my honour, he never touched me."

"But, Johnny, it was bold in you to make up to Lord De Courcy's daughter," said Fisher.

"I never saw one of them in my life."

"He 's going it altogether among the aristocracy, now," said another; "I suppose you would n't look at anybody under a viscount?"

"Can I help what that thief of an editor puts into his paper? Flogged! Huffle Scuffle told me I was a felon, but that was n't half so bad as this fellow;" and Johnny kicked the newspaper across the room.

"Indict him for a libel," said Fisher.

"Particularly for saying you wanted to marry a countess's daughter," said another clerk.

"I never heard such a scandal in my life," declared a third; "and then to say that the girl would n't look at you."

But not the less was it felt by all in the office that Johnny Eames was becoming a leading man among them, and that he was one with whom each of them would be pleased to be intimate. And even among the grandees this affair of the railway station did him no real harm. It was known that Crosbie had deserved to be thrashed, and known that Eames had thrashed him. It was all very well for Sir Raffle Buffle to talk of police magistrates and misdemeanours, but all the world at the Income-tax Office knew very well that Eames had come out from that affair with his head upright, and his right foot foremost.

"Never mind about the newspaper," a thoughtful old senior clerk said to him. "As he did get the licking and you did n't, you can afford to laugh at the newspaper."

"And you would n't write to the editor?"

"No, no; certainly not. No one thinks of defending himself to a newspaper except an ass;—unless it be some fellow who wants to have his name puffed. You may write what 's as true as the gospel, but they 'll know how to make fun of it."

Johnny therefore gave up his idea of an indignant letter to the editor, but he felt that he was bound to give some explanation of the whole matter to Lord De Guest. The affair had happened as he was coming from the earl's house, and all his own concerns had now been made so much a matter of interest to his kind friend, that he thought that he could not with propriety leave the earl to learn from the newspapers either the facts or the falsehoods. And, therefore, before he left his office he wrote the following letter:—

"Income-tax Office, December 29, 186—.

"My Lord,—"

He thought a good deal about the style in which he ought to address the peer, never having hitherto written to him. He began, "My dear Lord," on one sheet of paper, and then put it aside, thinking that it looked over-bold.

"My Lord,—As you have been so very kind to me, I feel that I ought to tell you what happened the other morning at the railway station, as I was coming back from Guestwick. That scoundrel Crosbie got into the same carriage with me at the Barchester Junction, and sat opposite to me all the way up to London. I did not speak a word to him, or he to me; but when he got out at the Paddington Station, I thought I ought not to let him go away, so I—— I can't say that I thrashed him as I wished to do; but I made an attempt, and I did give him a black eye. A whole quantity of policemen got round us, and I had n't a fair chance. I know you will think that I was wrong, and perhaps I was; but what could I do when he sat

opposite to me there for two hours, looking as though he thought himself the finest fellow in all London?

"They 've put a horrible paragraph into one of the newspapers, saying that I got so 'flogged' that I have n't been able to stir since. It is an atrocious falsehood, as is all the rest of the newspaper account. I was not touched. He was not nearly so bad a customer as the bull, and seemed to take it all very quietly. I must acknowledge, though, that he did n't get such a beating as he deserved.

"Your friend Sir R. B. sent for me this morning, and told me I was a felon. I did n't seem to care much for that, for he might as well have called me a murderer or a burglar; but I shall care very much indeed if I have made you angry with me. But what I most fear is the anger of some one else,—at Allington.

"Believe me to be, my Lord,

"Yours very much obliged and most sincerely,

"JOHN EAMES."

"I knew he 'd do it if ever he got the opportunity," said the earl when he had read his letter; and he walked about his room striking his hands together, and then thrusting his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets. "I knew he was made of the right stuff," and the earl rejoiced greatly in the prowess of his favourite. "I 'd have done it myself if I 'd seen him. I do believe I would." Then he went back to the breakfast-room and told Lady Julia. "What do you think?" said he; "Johnny Eames has come across Crosbie, and given him a desperate beating."

"No!" said Lady Julia, putting down her newspaper and spectacles, and expressing by the light of her eyes

anything but Christian horror at the wickedness of the deed.

"But he has, though. I knew he would if he saw him."

"Beaten him! Actually beaten him!"

"Sent him home to Lady Alexandrina with two black eyes."

"Two black eyes! What a young pickle! But did he get hurt himself?"

"Not a scratch, he says."

"And what 'll they do to him?"

"Nothing. Crosbie won't be fool enough to do anything. A man becomes an outlaw when he plays such a game as he has played. Anybody's hand may be raised against him with impunity. He can't show his face, you know. He can't come forward and answer questions as to what he has done. There are offences which the law can't touch, but which outrage public feeling so strongly that any one may take upon himself the duty of punishing them. He has been thrashed, and that will stick to him till he dies."

"Do tell Johnny from me that I hope he did n't get hurt," said Lady Julia. The old lady could not absolutely congratulate him on his feat of arms, but she did the next thing to it.

But the earl did congratulate him, with a full open assurance of his approval.

"I hope," he said, "I should have done the same at your age, under similar circumstances, and I 'm very glad that he proved less difficult than the bull. I 'm quite sure you did n't want any one to help you with Master Crosbie. As for that other person at Allington, if I understand such matters at all, I think she

will forgive you." It may, however, be a question whether the earl did understand such matters at all. And then he added, in a postscript: "When you write to me again,—and don't be long first,—begin your letter, 'My dear Lord De Guest,'—that is the proper way."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD MAN'S COMPLAINT.

"HAVE you been thinking again of what I was saying to you, Bell?" Bernard said to his cousin one morning.

"Thinking of it, Bernard? Why should I think more of it? I had hoped that you had forgotten it yourself."

"No," he said; "I am not so easy-hearted as that. I cannot look on such a thing as I would the purchase of a horse, which I could give up without sorrow if I found that the animal was too costly for my purse. I did not tell you that I loved you till I was sure of myself, and having made myself sure I cannot change at all."

"And yet you would have me change."

"Yes, of course I would. If your heart be free now, it must of course be changed before you come to love any man. Such change as that is to be looked for. But when you have loved, then it will not be easy to change you."

"But I have not."

"Then I have a right to hope. I have been hanging on here, Bell, longer than I ought to have done, because I could not bring myself to leave you without speaking of this again. I did not wish to seem to you to be importunate——"

"If you could only believe me in what I say."

"It is not that I do not believe. I am not a puppy or a fool, to flatter myself that you must be in love with me. I believe you well enough. But still it is possible that your mind may alter."

"It is impossible."

"I do not know whether my uncle or your mother has spoken to you about this."

"Such speaking would have no effect."

In fact, her mother had spoken to her, but she truly said that such speaking would have no effect. If her cousin could not win the battle by his own skill, he might have been quite sure, looking at her character as it was known to him, that he would not be able to win it by the skill of others.

"We have all been made very unhappy," he went on to say, "by this calamity which has fallen on poor Lily."

"And because she has been deceived by the man she did love, I am to make matters square by marrying a man I——" and then she paused. "Dear Bernard, you should not drive me to say words which will sound harsh to you."

"No words can be harsher than those which you have already spoken. But, Bell, at any rate, you may listen to me."

Then he told her how desirable it was with reference to all the concerns of the Dale family that she should endeavour to look favourably on his proposition. It would be good for them all, he said, especially for Lily, as to whom, at the present moment, their uncle felt so kindly. He, as Bernard pleaded, was so anxious at heart for this marriage, that he would do anything that

was asked of him if he were gratified. But if he were not gratified in this, he would feel that he had ground for displeasure.

Bell, as she had been desired to listen, did listen very patiently. But when her cousin had finished, her answer was very short. "Nothing that my uncle can say, or think, or do, can make any difference in this," said she.

"You will think nothing, then, of the happiness of others."

"I would not marry a man I did not love, to ensure any amount of happiness to others;—at least I know I ought not to do so. But I do not believe I should ensure any one's happiness by this marriage. Certainly not yours."

After this Bernard had acknowledged to himself that the difficulties in his way were great. "I will go away till next autumn," he said to his uncle.

"If you would give up your profession and remain here, she would not be so perverse."

"I cannot do that, sir. I cannot risk the well-being of my life on such a chance." Then his uncle had been angry with him, as well as with his niece. In his anger he determined that he would go again to his sister-in-law, and, after some unreasonable fashion, he resolved that it would become him to be very angry with her also, if she declined to assist him with all her influence as a mother.

"Why should they not both marry?" he said to himself. Lord De Guest's offer as to young Eames had been very generous. As he had then declared, he had not been able to express his own opinion at once; but on thinking over what the earl had said, he had found

himself very willing to heal the family wound in the manner proposed, if any such healing might be possible. That, however, could not be done quite as yet. When the time should come, and he thought it might come soon,—perhaps in the spring, when the days should be fine and the evenings again long,—he would be willing to take his share with the earl in establishing that new household. To Crosbie he had refused to give anything, and there was upon his conscience a shade of remorse in that he had so refused. But if Lily could be brought to love this other man, he would be more open-handed. She should have her share as though she was in fact his daughter. But then, if he intended to do so much for them at the Small House, should not they in return do something also for him? So thinking, he went again to his sister-in-law, determined to explain his views, even though it might be at the risk of some hard words between them. As regarded himself, he did not much care for hard words spoken to him. He almost expected that people's words should be hard and painful. He did not look for the comfort of affectionate soft greetings, and perhaps would not have appreciated them had they come to him. He caught Mrs. Dale walking in the garden, and brought her into his own room, feeling that he had a better chance there than in her own house. She, with an old dislike to being lectured in that room, had endeavoured to avoid the interview, but had failed.

"So I met John Eames at the manor," he had said to her in the garden.

"Ah, yes; and how did he get on there? I cannot conceive poor Johnny keeping holiday with the earl

and his sister. How did he behave to them, and how did they behave to him?"

"I can assure you he was very much at home there."

"Was he, indeed? Well, I hope it will do him good. He is, I 'm sure, a very good young man; only rather awkward."

"I did n't think him awkward at all. You 'll find, Mary, that he 'll do very well;—a great deal better than his father did."

"I 'm sure I hope he may." After that Mrs. Dale made her attempt to escape; but the squire had taken her prisoner, and led her captive into the house. "Mary," he said, as soon as he had induced her to sit down, "it is time that this should be settled between my nephew and niece."

"I am afraid there will be nothing to settle."

"What do you mean;—that you disapprove of it?"

"By no means,—personally. I should approve of it very strongly. But that has nothing to do with the question."

"Yes, it has. I beg your pardon, but it must have, and should have a great deal to do with it. Of course, I am not saying that anybody should now ever be compelled to marry anybody."

"I hope not."

"I never said that they ought, and never thought so. But I do think that the wishes of all her family should have very great weight with a girl that has been well brought up."

"I don't know whether Bell has been well brought up; but in such a matter as this nobody's wishes would weigh a feather with her; and, indeed, I could not take upon myself even to express a wish. To you

I can say that I should have been very happy if she could have regarded her cousin as you wish her to do."

"You mean that you are afraid to tell her so?"

"I am afraid to do what I think is wrong, if you mean that."

"I don't think it would be wrong, and therefore I shall speak to her myself."

"You must do as you like about that, Mr. Dale; I can't prevent you. I shall think you wrong to harass her on such a matter, and I fear also that her answer will not be satisfactory to you. If you choose to tell her your opinion, you must do so. Of course I shall think you wrong, that 's all."

Mrs. Dale's voice as she said this was stern enough, and so was her countenance. She could not forbid the uncle to speak his mind to his niece, but she especially disliked the idea of any interference with her daughter. The squire got up and walked about the room, trying to compose himself that he might answer her rationally, but without anger.

"May I go now?" said Mrs. Dale.

"May you go? Of course you may go if you like it. If you think that I am intruding upon you in speaking to you of the welfare of your two girls, whom I endeavoured to regard as my own daughters,—except in this, that I know they have never been taught to love me,—if you think that it is an interference on my part to show anxiety for their welfare, of course you may go."

"I did not mean to say anything to hurt you, Mr. Dale."

"Hurt me! What does it signify whether I am hurt or not? I have no children of my own, and of course

my only business in life is to provide for my nephews and nieces. I am an old fool if I expect that they are to love me in return, and if I venture to express a wish I am interfering and doing wrong! It is hard,—very hard. I know well that they have been brought up to dislike me, and yet I am endeavouring to do my duty by them."

"Mr. Dale, that accusation has not been deserved. They have not been brought up to dislike you. I believe that they have both loved and respected you as their uncle; but such love and respect will not give you a right to dispose of their hands."

"Who wants to dispose of their hands?"

"There are some things in which I think no uncle, —no parent,—should interfere, and of all such things this is the chief. If after that you may choose to tell her your wishes, of course you can do so."

"It will not be much good after you have set her against me."

"Mr. Dale, you have no right to say such things to me, and you are very unjust in doing so. If you think that I have set my girls against you, it will be much better that we should leave Allington altogether. I have been placed in circumstances which have made it difficult for me to do my duty to my children; but I have endeavoured to do it, not regarding my own personal wishes. I am quite sure, however, that it would be wrong in me to keep them here, if I am to be told by you that I have taught them to regard you unfavourably. Indeed, I cannot suffer such a thing to be said to me."

All this Mrs. Dale said with an air of decision, and with a voice expressing a sense of injury received,

which made the squire feel that she was very much in earnest.

"Is it not true," he said, defending himself, "that in all that relates to the girls you have ever regarded me with suspicion?"

"No, it is not true." And then she corrected herself, feeling that there was something of truth in the squire's last assertion. "Certainly not with suspicion," she said. "But as this matter has gone so far, I will explain what my real feelings have been. In worldly matters you can do much for my girls, and have done much."

"And wish to do more," said the squire.

"I am sure you do. But I cannot on that account give up my place as their only living parent. They are my children, and not yours. And even could I bring myself to allow you to act as their guardian and natural protector, they would not consent to such an arrangement. You cannot call that suspicion."

"I can call it jealousy."

"And should not a mother be jealous of her children's love?"

During all this time the squire was walking up and down the room with his hands in his trousers pockets. And when Mrs. Dale had last spoken, he continued his walk for some time in silence.

"Perhaps it is well that you should have spoken out," he said.

"The manner in which you accused me made it necessary."

"I did not intend to accuse you, and I do not do so now; but I think that you have been, and that you are, very hard to me,—very hard indeed. I have en-

deavoured to make your children, and yourself also, sharers with me in such prosperity as has been mine. I have striven to add to your comfort and to their happiness. I am most anxious to secure their future welfare. You would have been very wrong had you declined to accept this on their behalf; but I think that in return for it you need not have begrudged me the affection and obedience which generally follows from such good offices."

"Mr. Dale, I have begrudged you nothing of this."

"I am hurt;—I am hurt," he continued. And she was surprised by his look of pain even more than by the unaccustomed warmth of his words. "What you have said has, I have known, been the case all along. But though I had felt it to be so, I own that I am hurt by your open words."

"Because I have said that my own children must ever be my own?"

"Ah, you have said more than that. You and the girls have been living here, close to me, for—how many years is it now?—and during all those years there has grown up for me no kindly feeling. Do you think that I cannot hear, and see, and feel? Do you suppose that I am a fool and do not know? As for yourself you would never enter this house if you did not feel yourself constrained to do so for the sake of appearances. I suppose it is all as it should be. Having no children of my own, I owe the duty of a parent to my nieces; but I have no right to expect from them in return either love, regard, or obedience. I know I am keeping you here against your will, Mary. I won't do so any longer." And he made a sign to her that she was to depart.

As she rose from her seat her heart was softened towards him. In these latter days he had shown much kindness to the girls,—a kindness that was more akin to the gentleness of love than had ever come from him before. Lily's fate had seemed to melt even his sternness, and he had striven to be tender in his words and ways. And now he spoke as though he had loved the girls, and had loved them in vain. Doubtless he had been a disagreeable neighbour to his sister-in-law, making her feel that it was never for her personally that he had opened his hand. Doubtless he had been moved by an unconscious desire to undermine and take upon himself her authority with her own children. Doubtless he had looked askance at her from the first day of her marriage with his brother. She had been keenly alive to all this since she had first known him, and more keenly alive to it than ever since the failure of those efforts she had made to live with him on terms of affection, made during the first year or two of her residence at the Small House. But, nevertheless, in spite of all, her heart bled for him now. She had gained her victory over him, having fully held her own position with her children; but now that he complained that he had been beaten in the struggle, her heart bled for him.

"My brother," she said, and as she spoke she offered him her hands, "it may be that we have not thought as kindly of each other as we should have done."

"I have endeavoured," said the old man. "I have endeavoured——" And then he stopped, either hindered by some excess of emotion, or unable to find the words which were necessary for the expression of his meaning.

"Let us endeavour once again,—both of us."

"What, begin again at near seventy! No, Mary, there is no more beginning again for me. All this shall make no difference to the girls. As long as I am here they shall have the house. If they marry, I will do for them what I can. I believe Bernard is much in earnest in his suit, and if Bell will listen to him, she shall still be welcomed here as mistress of Allington. What you have said shall make no difference;—but as to beginning again, it is simply impossible."

After that Mrs. Dale walked home through the garden by herself. He had studiously told her that that house in which they lived should be lent, not to her, but to her children, during his lifetime. He had positively declined the offer of her warmer regard. He had made her understand that they were to look on each other almost as enemies; but that she, enemy as she was, should still be allowed the use of his munificence, because he chose to do his duty by his nieces!

"It will be better for us that we shall leave it," she said to herself as she seated herself in her own arm-chair over the drawing-room fire.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DR. CROFTS IS CALLED IN.

Mrs. Dale had not sat long in her drawing-room before tidings were brought to her which for a while drew her mind away from that question of her removal. "Mamma," said Bell, entering the room, "I really do believe that Jane has got scarlatina." Jane, the parlour-maid, had been ailing for the last two days, but nothing serious had hitherto been suspected.

Mrs. Dale instantly jumped up. "Who is with her?" she asked.

It appeared from Bell's answer that both she and Lily had been with the girl, and that Lily was still in the room. Whereupon Mrs. Dale ran upstairs, and there was on the sudden a commotion in the house. In an hour or so the village doctor was there, and he expressed an opinion that the girl's ailment was certainly scarlatina. Mrs. Dale, not satisfied with this, sent off a boy to Guestwick for Dr. Crofts, having herself maintained an opposition of many years' standing against the medical reputation of the apothecary, and gave a positive order to the two girls not to visit poor Jane again. She herself had had scarlatina, and might do as she pleased. Then, too, a nurse was hired.

All this changed for a few hours the current of Mrs. Dale's thoughts; but in the evening she went back to

the subject of her morning conversation, and before the three ladies went to bed, they held together an open council of war upon the subject. Dr. Crofts had been found to be away from Guestwick, and word had been sent on his behalf that he would be over at Allington early on the following morning. Mrs. Dale had almost made up her mind that the malady of her favourite maid was not scarlatina, but had not on that account relaxed her order as to the absence of her daughters from the maid's bedside.

"Let us go at once," said Bell, who was even more opposed to any domination on the part of her uncle than was her mother. In the discussion which had been taking place between them the whole matter of Bernard's courtship had come upon the carpet. Bell had kept her cousin's offer to herself as long as she had been able to do so; but since her uncle had pressed the subject upon Mrs. Dale, it was impossible for Bell to remain silent any longer. "You do not want me to marry him, mamma, do you?" she had said, when her mother had spoken with some show of kindness towards Bernard. In answer to this, Mrs. Dale had protested vehemently that she had no such wish, and Lily, who still held to her belief in Dr. Crofts, was almost equally animated. To them all, the idea that their uncle should in any way interfere in their own views of life, on the strength of the pecuniary assistance which they had received from him, was peculiarly distasteful. But it was especially distasteful that he should presume to have even an opinion as to their disposition in marriage. They declared to each other that their uncle could have no right to object to any marriage which either of them might contemplate as long as their mother

should approve of it. The poor old squire had been right in saying that he was regarded with suspicion. He was so regarded. The fault had certainly been his own, in having endeavoured to win the daughters without thinking it worth his while to win the mother. The girls had unconsciously felt that the attempt was made, and had vigorously rebelled against it. It had not been their fault that they had been brought to live in their uncle's house, and made to ride on his ponies, and to eat partially of his bread. They had so eaten, and so lived, and declared themselves to be grateful. The squire was good in his way, and they recognised his goodness; but not on that account would they transfer to him one jot of the allegiance which as children they owed to their mother. When she told them her tale, explaining to them the words which their uncle had spoken that morning, they expressed their regret that he should be so grieved; but they were strong in assurances to their mother that she had been sinned against, and was not sinning.

"Let us go at once," said Bell.

"It is much easier said than done, my dear."

"Of course it is, mamma; else we should n't be here now. What I mean is this,—let us take some necessary first step at once. It is clear that my uncle thinks that our remaining here should give him some right over us. I do not say that he is wrong to think so. Perhaps it is natural. Perhaps, in accepting his kindness, we ought to submit ourselves to him. If that be so, it is a conclusive reason for our going."

"Could we not pay him rent for the house," said Lily, "as Mrs. Hearn does? You would like to remain here, mamma, if you could do that?"

"But we could not do that, Lily. We must choose for ourselves a smaller house than this, and one that is not burdened with the expense of a garden. Even if we paid but a moderate rent for this place, we should not have the means of living here."

"Not if we lived on toast and tea?" said Lily, laughing.

"But I should hardly wish you to live upon toast and tea; and indeed I fancy that I should get tired of such a diet myself."

"Never, mamma," said Lily. "As for me, I confess to a longing after mutton chops; but I don't think you would ever want such vulgar things."

"At any rate, it would be impossible to remain here," said Bell. "Uncle Christopher would not take rent from mamma; and even if he did, we should not know how to go on with our other arrangements after such a change. No; we must give up the dear old Small House."

"It is a dear old house," said Lily, thinking, as she spoke, more of those late scenes in the garden, when Crosbie had been with them in the autumn months, than of any of the former joys of her childhood.

"After all, I do not know that I should be right to move," said Mrs. Dale, doubtingly.

"Yes, yes," said both the girls at once. "Of course you will be right, mamma; there cannot be a doubt about it, mamma. If we can get any cottage, or even lodgings, that would be better than remaining here, now that we know what uncle Christopher thinks of it."

"It will make him very unhappy," said Mrs. Dale.

But even this argument did not in the least move the girls. They were very sorry that their uncle should

be unhappy. They would endeavour to show him by some increased show of affection that their feelings towards him were not unkind. Should he speak to them they would endeavour to explain to him that their thoughts towards him were altogether affectionate. But they could not remain at Allington increasing their load of gratitude, seeing that he expected a certain payment which they did not feel themselves able to render.

"We should be robbing him, if we stayed here," Bell declared;—"wilfully robbing him of what he believes to be his just share of the bargain."

So it was settled among them that notice should be given to their uncle of their intention to quit the Small House of Allington.

And then came the question as to their new home. Mrs. Dale was aware that her income was at any rate better than that possessed by Mrs. Eames, and therefore she had fair ground for presuming that she could afford to keep a house at Guestwick. "If we do go away, that is what we must do," she said.

"And we shall have to walk out with Mary Eames, instead of Susan Boyce," said Lily. "It won't make so much difference, after all."

"In that respect we shall gain as much as we lose," said Bell.

"And then it will be so nice to have the shops," said Lily, ironically.

"Only we shall never have any money to buy anything," said Bell.

"But we shall see more of the world," said Lily. "Lady Julia's carriage comes into town twice a week, and the Miss Gruffens drive about in great style. Upon the whole, we shall gain a great deal; only for the

poor old garden. Mamma, I do think I shall break my heart at parting with Hopkins; and as to him, I shall be disappointed in mankind if he ever holds his head up again after I am gone."

But in truth there was very much of sadness in their resolution, and to Mrs. Dale it seemed as though she were managing matters badly for her daughters, and allowing poverty and misfortune to come upon them through her own fault. She well knew how great a load of sorrow was lying on Lily's heart, hidden beneath those little attempts at pleasantry which she made. When she spoke of being disappointed in mankind, Mrs. Dale could hardly repress an outward shudder that would betray her thoughts. And now she was consenting to take them forth from their comfortable home, from the luxury of their lawns and gardens, and to bring them to some small dingy corner of a provincial town,—because she had failed to make herself happy with her brother-in-law. Could she be right to give up all the advantages which they enjoyed at Allington,—advantages which had come to them from so legitimate a source,—because her own feelings had been wounded? In all their future want of comfort, in the comfortless dowdiness of the new home to which she would remove them, would she not always blame herself for having brought them to that by her own false pride? And yet it seemed to her that she now had no alternative. She could not now teach her daughters to obey their uncle's wishes in all things. She could not make Bell understand that it would be well that she should marry Bernard because the squire had set his heart on such a marriage. She had gone so far that she could not now go back.

"I suppose we must move at Lady-day?" said Bell, who was in favour of instant action. "If so, had you not better let uncle Christopher know at once?"

"I don't think that we can find a house by that time."

"We can get in somewhere," continued Bell. "There are plenty of lodgings in Guestwick, you know." But the sound of the word lodgings was uncomfortable in Mrs. Dale's ears.

"If we are to go, let us go at once," said Lily. "We need not stand much upon the order of our going."

"Your uncle will be very much shocked," said Mrs. Dale.

"He cannot say that it is your fault," said Bell.

It was thus agreed between them that the necessary information should be at once given to the squire, and that the old, well-loved house should be left for ever. It would be a great fall in a worldly point of view,—from the Allington Small House to an abode in some little street of Guestwick. At Allington they had been county people,—raised to a level with their own squire and other squires by the circumstance of their residence; but at Guestwick they would be small even among the people of the town. They would be on an equality with the Eameses, and much looked down upon by the Gruffens. They would hardly dare to call any more at Guestwick Manor, seeing that they certainly could not expect Lady Julia to call upon them at Guestwick. Mrs. Boyce no doubt would patronise them, and they could already anticipate the condolence which would be offered to them by Mrs. Hearn. Indeed, such a movement on their part would be tanta-

mount to a confession of failure in the full hearing of so much of the world as was known to them.

I must not allow my readers to suppose that these considerations were a matter of indifference to any of the ladies at the Small House. To some women of strong mind, of highly strung philosophic tendencies, such considerations might have been indifferent. But Mrs. Dale was not of this nature, nor were her daughters. The good things of the world were good in their eyes, and they valued the privilege of a pleasant social footing among their friends. They were by no means capable of a wise contempt of the advantages which chance had hitherto given to them. They could not go forth rejoicing in the comparative poverty of their altered condition. But then, neither could they purchase those luxuries which they were about to abandon at the price which was asked for them.

"Had you not better write to my uncle?" said one of the girls. But to this Mrs. Dale objected that she could not make a letter on such a subject clearly intelligible, and that therefore she would see the squire on the following morning. "It will be very dreadful," she said, "but it will soon be over. It is not what he will say at the moment that I fear so much, as the bitter reproaches of his face when I shall meet him afterwards." So, on the following morning, she again made her way, and now without invitation, to the squire's study.

"Mr. Dale," she began, starting upon her work with some confusion in her manner, and hurry in her speech, "I have been thinking over what we were saying together yesterday, and I have come to a resolution

which I know I ought to make known to you without a moment's delay."

The squire also had thought of what had passed between them, and had suffered much as he had done so; but he had thought of it without acerbity or anger. His thoughts were ever gentler than his words, and his heart softer than any exponent of his heart that he was able to put forth. He wished to love his brother's children, and to be loved by them; but even failing that, he wished to do good to them. It had not occurred to him to be angry with Mrs. Dale after that interview was over. The conversation had not gone pleasantly with him; but then he hardly expected that things would go pleasantly. No idea had occurred to him that evil could come upon any of the Dale ladies from the words which had then been spoken. He regarded the Small House as their abode and home as surely as the Great House was his own. In giving him his due, it must be declared that any allusion to their holding these as a benefit done to them by him had been very far from his thoughts. Mrs. Hearn, who held her cottage at half its real value, grumbled almost daily at him as her landlord; but it never occurred to him that therefore he should raise her rent, or that in not doing so he was acting with special munificence. It had ever been to him a grumbling, cross-grained, unpleasant world; and he did not expect from Mrs. Hearn, or from his sister-in-law, anything better than that to which he had ever been used.

"It will make me very happy," said he, "if it has any bearing on Bell's marriage with her cousin."

"Mr. Dale, that is out of the question. I would not

vex you by saying so if I were not certain of it; but I know my child so well!"

"Then we must leave it to time, Mary."

"Yes, of course; but no time will suffice to make Bell change her mind. We will, however, leave the subject. And now, Mr. Dale, I have to tell you of something else;—we have resolved to leave the Small House."

"Resolved on what?" said the squire, turning his eyes full upon her.

"We have resolved to leave the Small House."

"Leave the Small House!" he said, repeating her words; "and where on earth do you mean to go?"

"We think we shall go into Guestwick."

"And why?"

"Ah, that is so hard to explain. If you would only accept the fact as I tell it to you, and not ask for the reasons which have guided me!"

"But that is out of the question, Mary. In such a matter as that I must ask your reasons; and I must tell you also that, in my opinion, you will not be doing your duty to your daughters in carrying out such an intention, unless your reasons are very strong indeed."

"But they are very strong," said Mrs. Dale; and then she paused.

"I cannot understand it," said the squire. "I cannot bring myself to believe that you are really in earnest. Are you not comfortable there?"

"More comfortable than we have any right to be with our means."

"But I thought you always did very nicely with your money. You never get into debt."

"No; I never get into debt. It is not that, ex-

actly. The fact is, Mr. Dale, we have no right to live there without paying rent; but we could not afford to live there if we did pay rent."

"Who has talked about rent?" he said, jumping up from his chair. "Some one has been speaking falsehoods of me behind my back." No gleam of the real truth had yet come to him. No idea had reached his mind that his relatives thought it necessary to leave his house in consequence of any word that he himself had spoken. He had never considered himself to have been in any special way generous to them, and would not have thought it reasonable that they should abandon the house in which they had been living, even if his anger against them had been strong and hot. "Mary," he said, "I must insist upon getting to the bottom of this. As for your leaving the house, it is out of the question. Where can you be better off, or so well? As to going into Guestwick, what sort of life would there be for the girls? I put all that aside as out of the question; but I must know what has induced you to make such a proposition. Tell me honestly,—has any one spoken evil of me behind my back?"

Mrs. Dale had been prepared for opposition and for reproach; but there was a decision about the squire's words, and an air of masterdom in his manner, which made her recognise more fully than she had yet done the difficulty of her position. She almost began to fear that she would lack power to carry out her purpose.

"Indeed, it is not so, Mr. Dale."

"Then what is it?"

"I know that if I attempt to tell you, you will be vexed, and will contradict me."

"Vexed I shall be, probably."

"And yet I cannot help it. Indeed, I am endeavouring to do what is right by you and by the children."

"Never mind me; your duty is to think of them."

"Of course it is; and in doing this they most cordially agree with me."

In using such argument as that, Mrs. Dale showed her weakness, and the squire was not slow to take advantage of it. "Your duty is to them," he said; "but I do not mean by that that your duty is to let them act in any way that may best please them for the moment. I can understand that they should be run away with by some romantic nonsense, but I cannot understand it of you."

"The truth is this, Mr. Dale. You think that my children owe to you that sort of obedience which is due to a parent, and as long as they remain here, accepting from your hands so large a part of their daily support, it is perhaps natural that you should think so. In this unhappy affair about Bell——"

"I have never said anything of the kind," said the squire, interrupting her.

"No; you have not said so. And I do not wish you to think that I make any complaint. But I feel that it is so, and they feel it. And, therefore, we have made up our minds to go away."

Mrs. Dale, as she finished, was aware that she had not told her story well, but she had acknowledged to herself that it was quite out of her power to tell it as it should be told. Her main object was to make her brother-in-law understand that she certainly would leave his house, and to make him understand this with as little pain to himself as possible. She did not in the least mind his thinking her foolish, if only she could so

carry her point as to be able to tell her daughters on her return that the matter was settled. But the squire, from his words and manners, seemed indisposed to give her this privilege.

"Of all the propositions which I ever heard," said he, "it is the most unreasonable. It amounts to this, that you are too proud to live rent-free in a house which belongs to your husband's brother, and therefore you intend to subject yourself and your children to the great discomfort of a very straitened income. If you yourself only were concerned I should have no right to say anything; but I think myself bound to tell you that, as regards the girls, everybody that knows you will think you to have been very wrong. It is in the natural course of things that they should live in that house. The place has never been let. As far as I know, no rent has ever been paid for the house since it was built. It has always been given to some member of the family, who has been considered as having the best right to it. I have considered your footing there as firm as my own here. A quarrel between me and your children would be to me a great calamity, though perhaps they might be indifferent to it. But if there were such a quarrel it would afford no reason for their leaving that house. Let me beg you to think over the matter again."

The squire could assume an air of authority on certain occasions, and he had done so now. Mrs. Dale found that she could only answer him by a simple repetition of her own intention; and, indeed, failed in making him any serviceable answer whatsoever.

"I know that you are very good to my girls," she said.

"I will say nothing about that," he answered; not thinking at that moment of the Small House, but of the full possession which he had desired to give to the elder of all the privileges which should belong to the mistress of Allington,—thinking also of the means by which he was hoping to repair poor Lily's shattered fortunes. What words were further said had no great significance, and Mrs. Dale got herself away, feeling that she had failed. As soon as she was gone the squire arose, and putting on his great-coat, went forth with his hat and stick to the front of the house. He went out in order that his thoughts might be more free, and that he might indulge in that solace which an injured man finds in contemplating his injury. He declared to himself that he was very hardly used,—so hardly used, that he almost began to doubt himself and his own motives. Why was it that the people around him disliked him so strongly,—avoided him and thwarted him in the efforts which he made for their welfare? He offered to his nephew all the privileges of a son,—much more indeed than the privileges of a son,—merely asking in return that he would consent to live permanently in the house which was to be his own. But his nephew refused. "He cannot bear to live with me," said the old man to himself sorely. He was prepared to treat his nieces with more generosity than the daughters of the House of Allington had usually received from their fathers; and they repelled his kindness, running away from him, and telling him openly that they would not be beholden to him. He walked slowly up and down the terrace, thinking of this very bitterly. He did not find in the contemplation of his grievance all that solace which a grievance

usually gives, because he accused himself in his thoughts rather than others. He declared to himself that he was made to be hated, and protested to himself that it would be well that he should die and be buried out of memory, so that the remaining Dales might have a better chance of living happily; and then as he thus discussed all this within his own bosom, his thoughts were very tender, and though he was aggrieved, he was most affectionate to those who had most injured him. But it was absolutely beyond his power to reproduce outwardly, with words and outward signs, such thoughts and feelings.

It was now very nearly the end of the year, but the weather was still soft and open. The air was damp rather than cold, and the lawns and fields still retained the green tints of new vegetation. As the squire was walking on the terrace Hopkins came up to him, and touching his hat, remarked that they should have frost in a day or two.

"I suppose we shall," said the squire.

"We must have the mason to the flues of that little grape-house, sir, before I can do any good with a fire there."

"Which grape-house?" said the squire, crossly.

"Why, the grape-house in the other garden, sir. It ought to have been done last year by rights." This Hopkins said to punish his master for being cross to him. On that matter of the flues of Mrs. Dale's grape-house he had, with much consideration, spared his master during the last winter, and he felt that this ought to be remembered now. "I can't put any fire in it, not to do any real good, till something 's done. That 's sure."

"Then don't put any fire in it," said the squire.

Now the grapes in question were supposed to be peculiarly fine, and were the glory of the garden of the Small House. They were always forced, though not forced so early as those at the Great House, and Hopkins was in a state of great confusion.

"They 'll never ripen, sir; not the whole year through."

"Then let them be unripe," said the squire, walking about.

Hopkins did not at all understand it. The squire in his natural course was very unwilling to neglect any such matter as this, but would be specially unwilling to neglect anything touching the Small House. So Hopkins stood on the terrace, raising his hat and scratching his head. "There 's something wrong amongst them," said he to himself, sorrowfully.

But when the squire had walked to the end of the terrace and had turned upon the path which led round the side of the house, he stopped and called to Hopkins.

"Have what is needful done to the flue," he said.

"Yes, sir; very well, sir. It 'll only be re-setting the bricks. Nothing more ain't needful, just this winter."

"Have the place put in perfect order while you 're about it," said the squire, and then he walked away.

CHAPTER XIX.

DR. CROFTS IS TURNED OUT.

"HAVE you heard the news, my dear, from the Small House?" said Mrs. Boyce to her husband, some two or three days after Mrs. Dale's visit to the squire. It was one o'clock, and the parish pastor had come in from his ministrations to dine with his wife and children.

"What news?" said Mr. Boyce, for he had heard none.

"Mrs. Dale and the girls are going to leave the Small House; they 're going into Guestwick to live."

"Mrs. Dale going away; nonsense!" said the vicar. "What on earth should take her into Guestwick? She does n't pay a shilling of rent where she is."

"I can assure you it 's true, my dear. I was with Mrs. Hearn just now, and she had it direct from Mrs. Dale's own lips. Mrs. Hearn said she 'd never been taken so much aback in her whole life. There 's been some quarrel, you may be sure of that."

Mr. Boyce sat silent, pulling off his dirty shoes preparatory to his dinner. Tidings so important, as touching the social life of his parish, had not come to him for many a day, and he could hardly bring himself to credit them at so short a notice.

"Mrs. Hearn says that Mrs. Dale spoke ever so firmly about it, as though determined that nothing should change her."

"And did she say why?"

"Well, not exactly. But Mrs. Hearn said she could understand there had been words between her and the squire. It could n't be anything else, you know. Probably it had something to do with that man Crosbie."

"They 'll be very pushed about money," said Mr. Boyce, thrusting his feet into his slippers.

"That 's just what I said to Mrs. Hearn. And those girls have never been used to anything like real economy. What 's to become of them I don't know;" and Mrs. Boyce, as she expressed her sympathy for her dear friends, received considerable comfort from the prospect of their future poverty. It always is so, and Mrs. Boyce was not worse than her neighbours.

"You 'll find they 'll make it up before the time comes," said Mr. Boyce, to whom the excitement of such a change in affairs was almost too good to be true.

"I 'm afraid not," said Mrs. Boyce; "I 'm afraid not. They are both so determined. I always thought that riding and giving the girls hats and habits was injurious. It was treating them as though they were the squire's daughters, and they were not the squire's daughters."

"It was almost the same thing."

"But now we see the difference," said the judicious Mrs. Boyce. "I often said that dear Mrs. Dale was wrong, and it turns out that I was right. It will make no difference to me, as regards calling on them and that sort of thing."

"Of course it won't."

"Not but what there must be a difference, and a very great difference too. It will be a terrible come

down for poor Lily with the loss of her fine husband and all."

After dinner, when Mr. Boyce had again gone forth upon his labours, the same subject was discussed between Mrs. Boyce and her daughters, and the mother was very careful to teach her children that Mrs. Dale would be just as good a person as ever she had been, and quite as much a lady, even though she should live in a very dingy house at Guestwick; from which lesson the Boyce girls learned plainly that Mrs. Dale with Bell and Lily were about to have a fall in the world, and that they were to be treated accordingly.

From all this, it will be discovered that Mrs. Dale had not given way to the squire's arguments, although she had found herself unable to answer them. As she had returned home she had felt herself to be almost vanquished, and had spoken to the girls with the air and tone of a woman who hardly knew in which course lay the line of her duty. But they had not seen the squire's manner on the occasion, nor heard his words, and they could not understand that their own purpose should be abandoned because he did not like it. So they talked their mother into fresh resolves, and on the following morning she wrote a note to her brother-in-law, assuring him that she had thought much of all that he had said, but again declaring that she regarded herself as bound in duty to leave the Small House. To this he had returned no answer, and she had communicated her intention to Mrs. Hearn, thinking it better that there should be no secret in the matter.

"I am sorry to hear that your sister-in-law is going to leave us," Mr. Boyce said to the squire that same afternoon.

"Who told you that?" asked the squire, showing by his tone that he by no means liked the topic of conversation which the parson had chosen.

"Well, I had it from Mrs. Boyce, and I think Mrs. Hearn told her."

"I wish Mrs. Hearn would mind her own business, and not spread idle reports."

The squire said nothing more, and Mr. Boyce felt that he had been very unjustly snubbed.

Dr. Crofts had come over and pronounced as a fact that it was scarlatina. Village apothecaries are generally wronged by the doubts which are thrown upon them, for the town doctors when they come always confirm what the village apothecaries have said.

"There can be no doubt as to its being scarlatina," the doctor declared; "but the symptoms are all favourable."

There was, however, much worse coming than this. Two days afterwards Lily found herself to be rather unwell. She endeavoured to keep it to herself, fearing that she should be brought under the doctor's notice as a patient; but her efforts were unavailing, and on the following morning it was known that she had also taken the disease. Dr. Crofts declared that everything was in her favour. The weather was cold. The presence of the malady in the house had caused them all to be careful, and, moreover, good advice was at hand at once. The doctor begged Mrs. Dale not to be uneasy, but he was very eager in begging that the two sisters might not be allowed to be together. "Could you not send Bell into Guestwick,—to Mrs. Eames's?" said he. But Bell did not choose to be sent to Mrs. Eames's, and was with great difficulty kept out of her

mother's bedroom, to which Lily as an invalid was transferred.

"If you will allow me to say so," he said to Bell, on the second day after Lily's complaint had declared itself, "you are wrong to stay here in the house."

"I certainly shall not leave mamma, when she has got so much upon her hands," said Bell.

"But if you should be taken ill she would have more on her hands," pleaded the doctor.

"I could not do it," Bell replied. "If I were taken over to Guestwick, I should be so uneasy that I should walk back to Allington the first moment that I could escape from the house."

"I think your mother would be more comfortable without you."

"And I think she would be more comfortable with me. I don't ever like to hear of a woman running away from illness; but when a sister or a daughter does so, it is intolerable." So Bell remained, without permission indeed to see her sister, but performing various outside administrations which were much needed.

And thus all manner of trouble came upon the inhabitants of the Small House, falling upon them as it were in a heap together. It was as yet barely two months since those terrible tidings had come respecting Crosbie; tidings which, it was felt at the time, would of themselves be sufficient to crush them; and now to that misfortune other misfortunes had been added,—one quick upon the heels of another. In the teeth of the doctor's kind prophecy Lily became very ill, and after a few days was delirious. She would talk to her mother about Crosbie, speaking of him as she used to speak in the autumn that was passed. But

even in her madness she remembered that they had resolved to leave their present home; and she asked the doctor twice whether their lodgings in Guestwick were ready for them.

It was thus that Crofts first heard of their intention. Now, in these days of Lily's worst illness, he came daily over to Allington, remaining there, on one occasion, the whole night. For all this he would take no fee;—nor had he ever taken a fee from Mrs. Dale. "I wish you would not come so often," Bell said to him one evening, as he stood with her at the drawing-room fire, after he had left the patient's room; "you are overloading us with obligations." On that day Lily was over the worst of the fever, and he had been able to tell Mrs. Dale that he did not think that she was now in danger.

"It will not be necessary much longer," he said; "the worst of it is over."

"It is such a luxury to hear you say so. I suppose we shall owe her life to you; but nevertheless——"

"Oh, no; scarlatina is not such a terrible thing now as it used to be."

"Then why should you have devoted your time to her as you have done? It frightens me when I think of the injury we must have done you."

"My horse has felt it more than I have," said the doctor, laughing. "My patients at Guestwick are not so very numerous." Then, instead of going, he sat himself down. "And it is really true," he said, "that you are all going to leave this house?"

"Quite true. We shall do so at the end of March, if Lily is well enough to be moved."

"Lily will be well long before that, I hope; not, in-

deed, that she ought to be moved out of her own rooms for many weeks to come yet."

"Unless we are stopped by her we shall certainly go at the end of March." Bell now had also sat down, and they both remained for some time looking at the fire in silence.

"And why is it, Bell?" he said, at last. "But I don't know whether I have a right to ask."

"You have a right to ask any question about us," she said. "My uncle is very kind. He is more than kind; he is generous. But he seems to think that our living here gives him a right to interfere with mamma. We don't like that, and, therefore, we are going."

The doctor still sat on one side of the fire, and Bell still sat opposite to him; but the conversation did not form itself very freely between them. "It is bad news," he said, at last.

"At any rate when we are ill you will not have so far to come and see us."

"Yes, I understand. That means that I am ungracious not to congratulate myself on having you all so much nearer to me; but I do not in the least. I cannot bear to think of you as living anywhere but here at Allington. Dales will be out of their place in a street at Guestwick."

"That 's hard upon the Dales, too."

"It is hard upon them. It 's a sort of offshoot from that very tyrannical law of noblesse oblige. I don't think you ought to go away from Allington, unless the circumstances are very imperative."

"But they are very imperative."

"In that case, indeed?" And then again he fell into silence.

"Have you never seen that mamma is not happy here?" she said, after another pause. "For myself, I never quite understood it all before as I do now; but now I see it."

"And I have seen it;—have seen at least what you mean. She has led a life of restraint; but then, how frequently is such restraint the necessity of a life? I hardly think that your mother would move on that account."

"No. It is on our account. But this restraint, as you call it, makes us unhappy, and she is governed by seeing that. My uncle is generous to her as regards money; but in other things,—in matters of feeling,—I think he has been ungenerous."

"Bell," said the doctor; and then he paused.

She looked up at him, but made no answer. He had always called her by her Christian name, and they two had ever regarded each other as close friends. At the present moment she had forgotten all else besides this, and yet she had infinite pleasure in sitting there and talking to him.

"I am going to ask you a question which perhaps I ought not to ask, only that I have known you so long that I almost feel that I am speaking to a sister."

"You may ask me what you please," said she.

"It is about your cousin Bernard."

"About Bernard!" said Bell.

It was now dusk; and as they were sitting without other light than that of the fire, she knew that he could not discern the colour which covered her face as her cousin's name was mentioned. But, had the light of day pervaded the whole room, I doubt whether Crofts

would have seen that blush, for he kept his eyes firmly fixed upon the fire.

"Yes, about Bernard. I don't know whether I ought to ask you."

"I 'm sure I can't say," said Bell, speaking words of the nature of which she was not conscious.

"There has been a rumour in Guestwick that he and you——"

"It is untrue," said Bell; "quite untrue. If you hear it repeated, you should contradict it. I wonder why people should say such things."

"It would have been an excellent marriage;—all your friends must have approved it."

"What do you mean, Dr. Crofts? How I do hate those words, 'an excellent marriage.' In them is contained more of wicked worldliness than any other words that one ever hears spoken. You want me to marry my cousin simply because I should have a great house to live in, and a coach. I know that you are my friend; but I hate such friendship as that."

"I think you misunderstand me, Bell. I mean that it would have been an excellent marriage, provided you had both loved each other."

"No, I don't misunderstand you. Of course it would be an excellent marriage, if we loved each other. You might say the same if I loved the butcher or the baker. What you mean is, that it makes a reason for loving him."

"I don't think I did mean that."

"Then you mean nothing."

After that, there were again some minutes of silence, during which Dr. Crofts got up to go away. "You

have scolded me very dreadfully," he said, with a slight smile, "and I believe I have deserved it for interfering——"

"No; not at all for interfering."

"But at any rate you must forgive me before I go."

"I won't forgive you at all, unless you repent of your sins, and alter altogether the wickedness of your mind. You will become very soon as bad as Dr. Gruffen."

"Shall I?"

"Oh, but I will forgive you; for after all, you are the most generous man in the world."

"Oh, yes; of course I am. Well,—good-bye."

"But, Dr. Crofts, you should not suppose others to be so much more worldly than yourself. You do not care for money so very much——"

"But I do care very much."

"If you did you would not come here for nothing day after day."

"I do care for money very much. I have sometimes nearly broken my heart because I could not get opportunities of earning it. It is the best friend that a man can have——"

"Oh, Dr. Crofts!"

"——the best friend that a man can have, if it be honestly come by. A woman can hardly realise the sorrow which may fall upon a man from the want of such a friend."

"Of course a man likes to earn a decent living by his profession; and you can do that."

"That depends upon one's ideas of decency."

"Ah! mine never ran very high. I 've always had a sort of aptitude for living in a pigsty;—a clean pigsty, you know, with nice fresh bean straw to lie upon.

I think it was a mistake when they made a lady of me. I do, indeed."

"I do not," said Dr. Crofts.

"That 's because you don't quite know me yet. I 've not the slightest pleasure in putting on three different dresses a day. I do it very often because it comes to me to do it, from the way in which we have been taught to live. But when we get to Guestwick I mean to change all that; and if you come in to tea, you 'll see me in the same brown frock that I wear in the morning,—unless, indeed, the morning work makes the brown frock dirty. Oh, Dr. Crofts! you 'll have it pitch-dark riding home under the Guestwick elms."

"I don't mind the dark," he said; and it seemed as though he hardly intended to go even yet.

"But I do," said Bell, "and I shall ring for candles." But he stopped her as she put her hand out to the bell-pull.

"Stop a moment, Bell. You need hardly have the candles before I go, and you need not begrudge my staying either, seeing that I shall be all alone at home."

"Begrudge your staying!"

"But, however, you shall begrudge it, or else make me very welcome." He still held her by the wrist, which he had caught as he prevented her from summoning the servant.

"What do you mean?" said she. "You know you are welcome to us as flowers in May. You always were welcome; but now, when you have come to us in our trouble—— At any rate, you shall never say that I turn you out."

"Shall I never say so?" And still he held her by the wrist. He had kept his chair throughout, but she

was standing before him,—between him and the fire. But she, though he held her in this way, thought little of his words, or of his action. They had known each other with great intimacy, and though Lily would still laugh at her, saying that Dr. Crofts was her lover, she had long since taught herself that no such feeling as that would ever exist between them.

"Shall I never say so, Bell? What if so poor a man as I ask for the hand that you will not give to so rich a man as your cousin Bernard?"

She instantly withdrew her arm and moved back very quickly a step or two across the rug. She did it almost with the motion which she might have used had he insulted her; or had a man spoken such words who would not, under any circumstances, have a right to speak them.

"Ah, yes! I thought it would be so," he said. "I may go now, and may know that I have been turned out."

"What is it you mean, Dr. Crofts? What is it you are saying? Why do you talk that nonsense, trying to see if you can provoke me?"

"Yes; it is nonsense. I have no right to address you in that way, and certainly should not have done it now that I am in your house in the way of my profession. I beg your pardon." Now he also was standing, but he had not moved from his side of the fireplace. "Are you going to forgive me before I go?"

"Forgive you for what?" said she.

"For daring to love you; for having loved you almost as long as you can remember; for loving you better than all beside. This alone you should forgive; but will you forgive me for having told it?"

He had made her no offer, nor did she expect that he was about to make one. She herself had hardly yet realised the meaning of his words, and she certainly had asked herself no question as to the answer which she should give to them. There are cases in which lovers present themselves in so unmistakable a guise, that the first word of open love uttered by them tells their whole story, and tells it without the possibility of a surprise. And it is generally so when the lover has not been an old friend, when even his acquaintance has been of modern date. It had been so essentially in the case of Crosbie and Lily Dale. When Crosbie came to Lily and made his offer, he did it with perfect ease and thorough self-possession, for he almost knew that it was expected. And Lily, though she had been flurried for a moment, had her answer pat enough. She already loved the man with all her heart, delighted in his presence, basked in the sunshine of his manliness, rejoiced in his wit, and had tuned her ears to the tone of his voice. It had all been done, and the world expected it. Had he not made his offer, Lily would have been ill-treated;—though, alas, alas, there was future ill-treatment, so much heavier, in store for her! But there are other cases in which a lover cannot make himself known as such without great difficulty, and when he does do so, cannot hope for an immediate answer in his favour. It is hard upon old friends that this difficulty should usually fall the heaviest upon them. Crofts had been so intimate with the Dale family that very many persons had thought it probable that he would marry one of the girls. Mrs. Dale herself had thought so, and had almost hoped it. Lily had certainly done both. These thoughts and hopes

had somewhat faded away, but yet their former existence should have been in the doctor's favour. But now, when he had in some way spoken out, Bell started back from him and would not believe that he was in earnest. She probably loved him better than any man in the world, and yet, when he spoke to her of love, she could not bring herself to understand him.

"I don't know what you mean, Dr. Crofts; indeed, I do not," she said.

"I had meant to ask you to be my wife; simply that. But you shall not have the pain of making me a positive refusal. As I rode here to-day I thought of it. During my frequent rides of late I have thought of little else. But I told myself that I had no right to do it. I have not even a house in which it would be fit that you should live."

"Dr. Crofts, if I loved you,—if I wished to marry you——" and then she stopped herself.

"But you do not?"

"No; I think not. I suppose not. No. But in any way no consideration about money has anything to do with it."

"But I am not that butcher or that baker whom you could love?"

"No," said Bell; and then she stopped herself from further speech, not as intending to convey all her answer in that one word, but as not knowing how to fashion any further words.

"I knew it would be so," said the doctor.

It will, I fear, be thought by those who condescend to criticise this lover's conduct and his mode of carrying on his suit, that he was very unfit for such work. Ladies will say that he wanted courage, and men will

say that he wanted wit. I am inclined, however, to believe that he behaved as well as men generally do behave on such occasions, and that he showed himself to be a good average lover. There is your bold lover, who knocks his lady-love over as he does a bird, and who would anathematise himself all over, and swear that his gun was distraught, and look about as though he thought the world was coming to an end, if he missed to knock over his bird. And there is your timid lover, who winks his eyes when he fires, who has felt certain from the moment in which he buttoned on his knickerbockers that he would kill nothing, and who, when he hears the loud congratulations of his friends, cannot believe that he really did bag that beautiful winged thing by his own prowess. The beautiful winged thing which the timid man carries home in his bosom, declining to have it thrown into a miscellaneous cart, so that it may never be lost in a common crowd of game, is better to him than are the slaughtered hecatombs to those who kill their birds by the hundred.

But Dr. Crofts had so winked his eye, that he was not in the least aware whether he had winged his bird or not. Indeed, having no one at hand to congratulate him, he was quite sure that the bird had flown away uninjured into the next field. "No" was the only word which Bell had given in answer to his last sidelong question, and No is not a comfortable word to lovers. But there had been that in Bell's No which might have taught him that the bird was not escaping without a wound, if he had still had any of his wits about him.

"Now I will go," said he. Then he paused for an

answer, but none came. "And you will understand what I meant when I spoke of being turned out."

"Nobody—turns you out." And Bell, as she spoke, had almost descended to a sob.

"But it is time that I should go; is it not? And, Bell, don't suppose that this little scene will keep me away from your sister's bedside. I shall be here to-morrow, and you will find that you will hardly know me again for the same person." Then in the dark he put out his hand to her.

"Good-bye," she said, giving him her hand. He pressed hers very closely, but she, though she wished to do so, could not bring herself to return the pressure. Her hand remained passive in his, showing no sign of offence; but it was absolutely passive.

"Good-bye, dearest friend," he said.

"Good-bye," she answered,—and then he was gone.

She waited quite still till she heard the front door close after him, and then she crept silently up to her own bedroom, and sat herself down in a low rocking-chair over the fire. It was in accordance with a custom already established that her mother should remain with Lily till the tea was ready downstairs; for in these days of illness such dinners as were provided were eaten early. Bell, therefore, knew that she had still some half-hour of her own, during which she might sit and think undisturbed.

And what naturally should have been her first thoughts?—that she had ruthlessly refused a man who, as she now knew, loved her well, and for whom she had always felt the warmest friendship? Such were not her thoughts, nor were they in any way akin to this. They ran back instantly to years gone by,—over

long years, as her few years were counted,—and settled themselves on certain halcyon days, in which she had dreamed that he had loved her, and had fancied that she had loved him. How she had schooled herself for those days since that, and taught herself to know that her thoughts had been over-bold! And now it had all come round. The only man that she had ever liked had loved her. Then there came to her a memory of a certain day, in which she had been almost proud to think that Crosbie had admired her, in which she had almost hoped that it might be so; and as she thought of this she blushed, and struck her foot twice upon the floor. "Dear Lily," she said to herself—"poor Lily!" But the feeling which induced her then to think of her sister had had no relation to that which had first brought Crosbie into her mind.

And this man had loved her through it all,—this priceless, peerless man,—this man who was as true to the backbone as that other man had shown himself to be false; who was as sound as the other man had proved himself to be rotten. A smile came across her face as she sat looking at the fire, thinking of this. A man had loved her, whose love was worth possessing. She hardly remembered whether or no she had refused him or accepted him. She hardly asked herself what she would do. As to all that it was necessary that she should have many thoughts, but the necessity did not press upon her quite immediately. For the present she might sit and triumph;—and thus triumphant she sat there till the old nurse came in and told her that her mother was waiting for her below.

END OF VOL. II.

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